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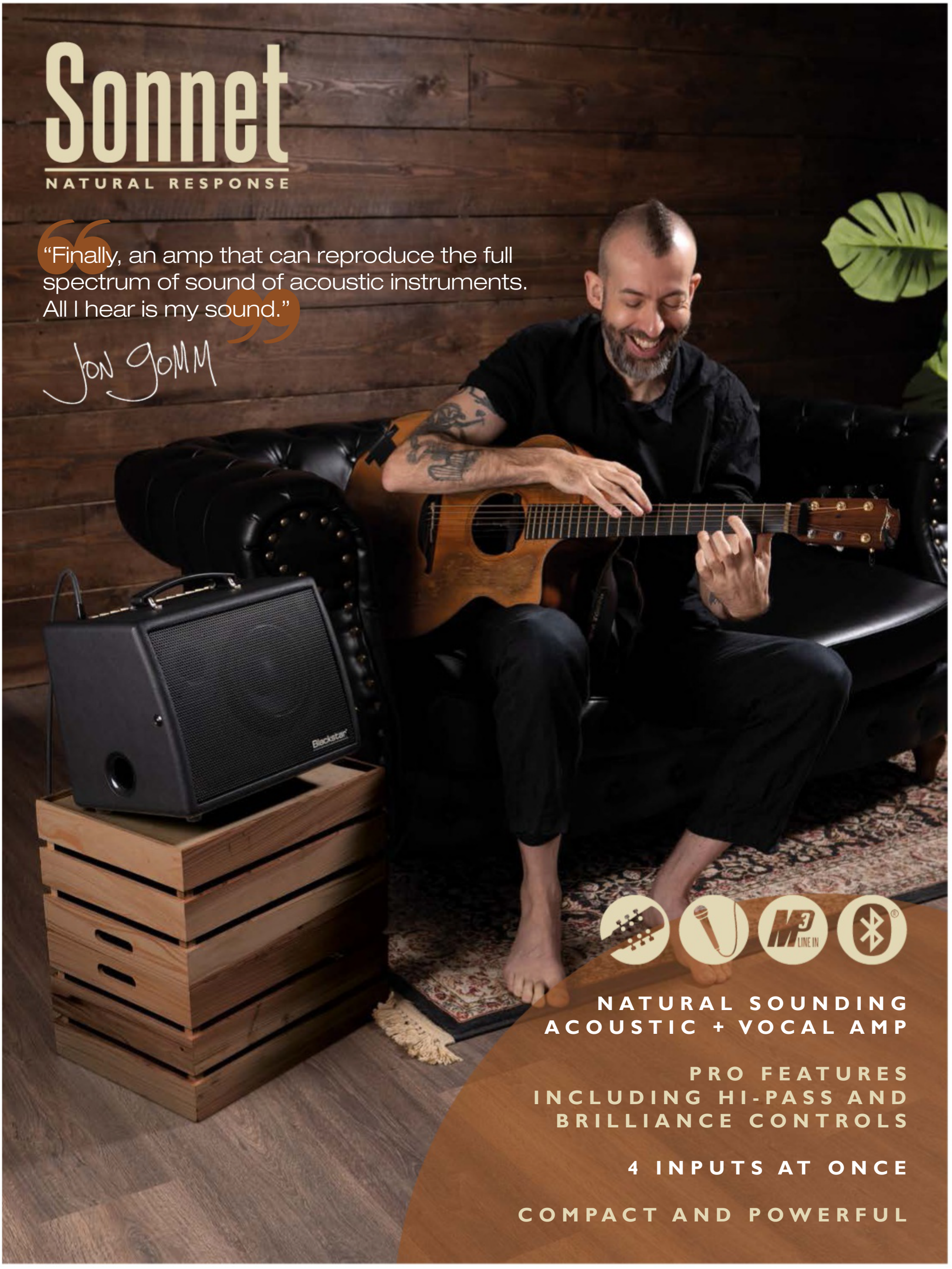

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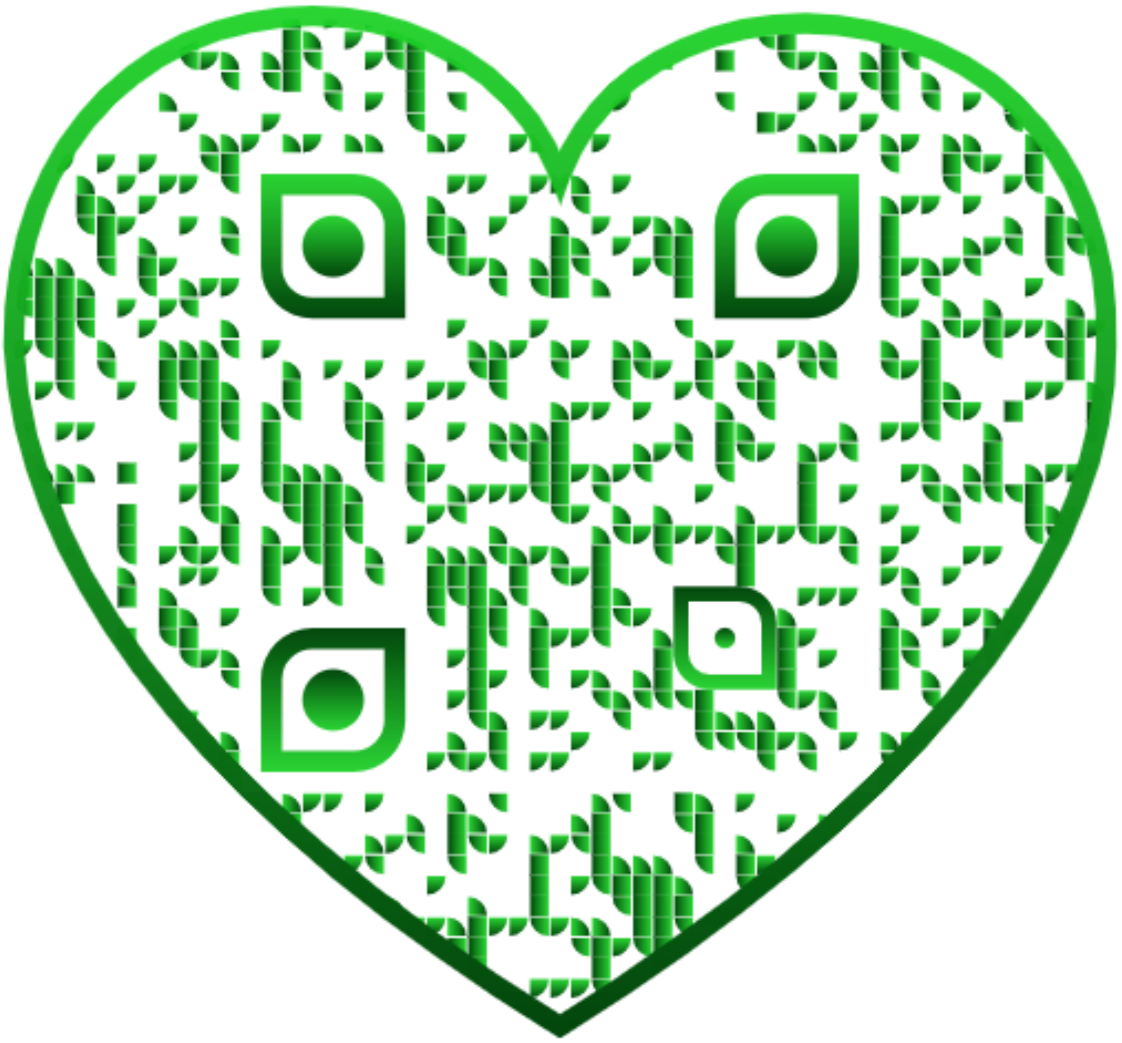

Guitar
MAGAZINE

APRIL 2020
ISSUE 379
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THE BEST EPIPHONES EVER?

- NEW HEADSTOCK
- VINTAGE STYLE
- KILLER TONES

REVIEWED

GRETSCH
HARMONY
GAMECHANGER
WALRUS AUDIO
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+

ARE PRE-CBS FENDERS REALLY BETTER?

HOW GEAR ABUSE DROVE A ROCK REVOLUTION

AT HOME WITH TYLER BRYANT

JOEL PATERSON TALKS BEATLES

BRIAN FALLON PUNK TROUBADOUR

THEY'VE ARRIVED

Sheeran BY Lowden

"This is what I record with, this is what I play with, this is what I have at home to just chill out and strum to, and I think once you know you're serious about playing guitar this is the best instrument that you could get."

Ed Sheeran

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ISSUE 379

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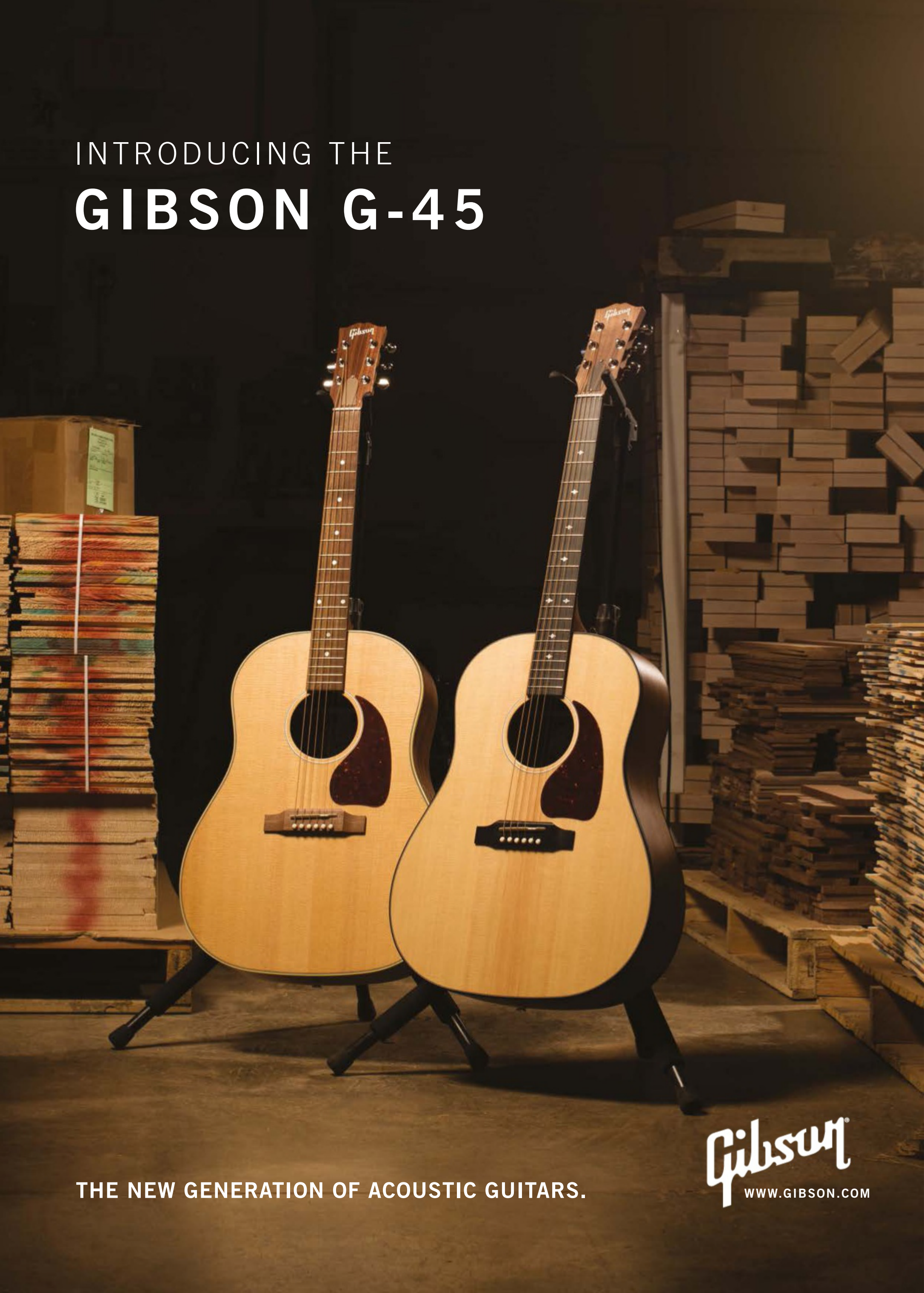

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EDITOR'S LETTER

CHEAP AT TWICE THE PRICE

How much guitar can you get for £349/$399? In 2020, the answer is *a lot*. The Epiphone Les Paul Special that graces this month's cover – and is reviewed alongside two other Inspired By Gibson models from p20 onwards – is one of those rare instruments that offers a supernova-sized bang for your buck.

It's also very difficult to talk yourself out of buying, even if you have other Les Pauls. Even if one or more of them is a vintage Les Paul Special. How much? Three-hundred and what?! Oh please, shut up and take my money…

Elsewhere in this month's mag, we visit one of Nashville's hottest young gunslingers, Tyler Bryant, to check out the tools of his trade and find out what it's like to open for the likes of Guns N' Roses, Aerosmith and AC/DC on some of the world's biggest stages. We also catch up with The Gaslight Anthem frontman Brian Fallon to hear more about his widescreen new solo album, and discover why his guitar strap is getting shorter as the years roll by.

And if you're a fan of slapback, Bigsby vibratos and monster picking, let us introduce you to your new favourite guitarist. Meet Joel Paterson – the sharp-dressed Chicago musician whose Fab Four fixation has given birth to an instrumental album that reimagines the music of The Beatles as the soundtrack to a Sterling Cooper cocktail hour.

Finally, don't forget to head to *Guitar.com* and follow our socials for daily news, reviews, features, video and more from the home of all things guitar. I'll see you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

CLICK TRACK

In response to Mike Barnham's letter on the 'click' bass on Bert Kaempfert's recordings [GM378], although you can get an approximation on, say, a Jazz Bass, I am fairly sure that it was a Fender Bass VI on the recordings, usually played by the German guitarist Ladi Geisler. His best-known track was *The Bass Walks* – I did a version of it recently and fiddled with the tone controls on the Bass VI to get a sound that resembled the clicky bass sound. Hope that helps.

GEORGE GEDDES, VIA EMAIL

VOX POPULI

I noticed lately that there is no readers 'have your say' page, so I wanted to email you directly. I must say that wasting six pages on how to hang your guitar was a waste of magazine space as, let's face it, it's not rocket science or even anything to do with building or maintaining a guitar – the one good thing about the DIY workshop feature was the Fano Alt De Facto SP6. Marvellous. All you really need is the hanger, which usually comes with screws and plugs and a decent drill.
I would have preferred more news from NAMM – most of us will never have that opportunity to go, so the more news and pics the better.

NODROG2008, VIA EMAIL

As you can see, the reader's correspondence page is alive and well, and isn't going anywhere – you must have just missed it! As a regular reader of the mag, we hope you appreciate that while detailed maintenance articles are a regular feature (head to p123 for this month's deep dive), not everyone is confident enough to take on woodworking and electronics. Those who aren't particularly DIY-inclined might be a little wary of hanging guitars on walls, so we wanted to show that there really isn't anything to be afraid of if you follow the correct steps – after all, we wouldn't want anything tragic happening to that SP6! We're glad you enjoyed the NAMM coverage, and there's loads more on Guitar.com if you feel like you haven't had your fill!

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

"I like when guitars get that light ageing or the Journeyman Relic-level but the Heavy Relic or historic copycats are just wrong. Why would anyone by a $4,000-plus guitar that looks like it's been dragged behind a truck down a gravel road!?"

RANDAHL PEDERSEN, VIA FACEBOOK

"Dig the American Ultra Jazzmaster – the neck joint and carved-out slot is super comfortable. The noiseless pickups are kinda cool, something different. Super-hot!"

NICK ROSE, VIA FACEBOOK

"In response to Ian Fowles' column about practising in front of the TV, most of my 'practice' is this way. Many will think of it as mindless noodling but I too have had some decent music come out of it. What's handy is that it can expand your musical vocabulary if you just play along with any music – ads, incidental scores, whatever. You'll hit different genres, and it's like at adding that extra guitar part that should have been on the final mix."

PAUL NEEDS, VIA FACEBOOK

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BRIAN FALLON PUNK TROUBADOUR

ONES TO WATCH

DREAM NAILS

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

From raising funds for a sign-language interpreter at their shows, to a YouTube series dedicated to reviewing chips, London "punk witches" Dream Nails are making a name for themselves on and off the stage

The past five years have been anything but a nightmare for Dream Nails. Singer Janey Starling and guitarist Anya Pearson founded the band in 2015 based on their mutual commitment to feminist activism – ideals that are palpable in their unapologetically millennial-friendly music and their joyous, inclusive stage shows. Self-described as "punk witches", their infectious energy and modernisation of the riot grrrl movement have garnered them much attention. Within two years of their formation they were picked to perform at Glastonbury's Sisterhood stage – the only all-female stage at the festival – and this year they toured with Anti-Flag.

Now on the cusp of releasing their debut album, we speak to Pearson, who tells us how it all began, from the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, to ketchup and card-loading with a punk legend

What drew you to playing guitar?

"I grew up listening to my mum play the guitar. She was in the Stepney Sisters, one of the UK's first feminist rock bands, in the 1970s, and was one of the original members of the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. I can remember the sound of her all-women improv jazz band radiating from our basement when I was a kid. She was a big inspiration. She taught me how to play guitar and really encouraged me to start my own band."

“I PLAY A FENDER MUSTANG 90, WHICH HAS P-90 PICKUPS FOR A BIT MORE GRIT. WHEN PLAYING LIVE, I HAVE A BOSS BLUES DRIVER ON, AND PLAY AROUND WITH BOSS DELAY AND AN ELECTRO-HARMONIX CATHEDRAL PEDAL FOR REVERB AND SPACE”

Your live shows are riotous, vibrant and fun, but also inclusive. Is that a difficult balancing act?
“Inclusivity is important to us. We make sure venue toilets are gender-neutral, we’re crowdfunding for a British Sign Language interpreter to be at our London launch show, and we have taken responsibility for getting some venue staff trained by Good Night Out [a charity campaigning for safer nightlife spaces to prevent sexual harassment and assault]. But we think those things should be standard. A shocking number of women get groped at gigs. What is the point of playing feminist music in that kind of space? We always ask for women and non-binary people to come to the front of our shows, and we’ll stop a show in the middle if we’re not satisfied. We think that’s what makes our shows so riotous and fun – women and non-binary people actually feel free to dance and rage and sing with us.”

Your debut album tackles societal injustices from a queer feminist perspective. What artists have helped push your music in this direction?
“Dream Nails are forever indebted to our punk foremothers, The Slits and Bikini Kill, but today’s feminist punk is intersectional. We’re inspired by the intersectional feminist activist movement, which is trans-inclusive and takes into account race, sexuality, class, gender, disability and so on. Exciting bands like Big Joanie and Petrol Girls are pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a feminist musician today.”

Tell us more about your main guitars and amplifiers.
“I play a Fender Mustang 90, which has P-90 pickups for a bit more grit. When playing live, I have a Boss Blues Driver on, and play around with Boss delay and an Electro-Harmonix Cathedral pedal for reverb and space. I love my octave pedal for those heavier riff moments. I’ve just bought an Orange Dual Terror amp, which I’m excited to take on our album tour in April.”

Your guitar work on this album is direct and fuzzy but cleverly counterpoints the vocals. What were your main influences during the recording process?
“Our producer, Tarek Musa from Spring King, tried to capture the poppy energy of surf-punk bands such as Fidlar during the recording. When I wrote *Jillian* and *Swimming Pool*, I was inspired by Rachel Aggs’ [Sacred Paws] ability to transpose highlife-style guitar hooks to a rockier sound. And I love the way that Marissa Paternoster [Screaming Females] combines heavy riffs and guitar harmonies. In the studio, I multi-tracked my parts as often as I could, for more harmonic depth, as in our tune *People Are Like Cities*. Tom Morello is an influence for chunkier riffs. *Kiss My Fist* and *Payback* are feminist takes on Rage Against The Machine. Tom’s been a big supporter of our band. I had a fun geek-out with him about gear at his London show last summer.”

Does getting praise from respected radio stations and music magazines impact the band?
“It’s been so fun. We’ve had love from Jack Saunders and Abbie McCarthy at Radio 1, Steve Lamacq and Tom Robinson over on BBC Radio 6 Music, and John Kennedy on Radio X. *The Guardian* even made our single *Text Me Back* – a wailing homage to being ghosted by your crush – their track of the week. It’s helped us gain new fans, and hopefully assisted a few of them in getting over the humiliation of romantic rejection.”

You recently supported Anti-Flag on tour. How was that?
“It was awesome. We joined Anti-Flag and the Homeless Gospel Choir for a leg of their European tour, playing in Lisbon, Barcelona, Madrid, Milan and a few other spots. It was such an honour to open for a band we loved as teenagers – and we’ve rarely made faster friends. We even roped in Justin Sane, their lead singer, for a guest spot on our YouTube series *Chip Advisor*. We review chips from around the world. Justin’s from Pittsburgh, home of Heinz tomato ketchup, so his culinary expertise is outstanding.”

What does the future hold for Dream Nails?
“We’re releasing our self-titled debut album on 3 April with Alcopop! Records, and embarking on a UK tour in April, with a raft of festivals throughout the summer. We are also releasing *Kiss My Fist* on the one-year anniversary of that queer couple getting attacked on a London bus for refusing to kiss for the entertainment of men. It’s an empowering banger dedicated to every queer person just trying to get from A to B without getting beaten up.”

Dream Nails’ debut album is out 3 April on Alcopop! Records

THE PLAYLIST

© Eleanor Jane

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

JONATHAN WILSON
DIXIE BLUR

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The fourth album from the lauded producer and songwriter boasts live instrumentation, vintage Martins and a lap steel with built-in fuzz

How do you follow an album that swiped several album-of-the-year accolades and was regarded as a triumph of complex and inspired songcraft and guitar work? That's the question Jonathan Wilson was forced to ask himself when working on the follow-up to his sensational 2018 record *Rare Birds*.

The album's success brought him his first batch of national TV appearances in the US, where he rocked up on *Conan* and *CBS This Morning Saturday*, and saw him step away from his producer guise and gain recognition as an accomplished songwriter in his own right.

For *Dixie Blur*, Wilson returned to Nashville with a live studio band, rather than recording each part individually back in LA. Pat Sansone of Wilco produced the album, with sessions taking place at Studio A at the Sound Emporium, made famous by the late country maverick Cowboy Jack Clement. Cut in just six days, the album's title refers to the speed at which the long player was completed.

"It's the most down to earth and emotional, both musically and lyrically, that I've ever been," says Wilson. Here, he picks out his favourite guitars and guitar parts on the album.

'69 CORVETTE

"Most of the record finds me fingerpicking and playing with a flat pick on a 1947 Martin 000-18. That's the one that was in the booth with me and went from song to song, basically. That's on about 90 per cent of the thing. On *'69 Corvette*, you can really hear the delicate sound of a small-bodied orchestra-style guitar."

KOREAN TEA

"When I went to Nashville, I made a habit of sometimes going to the shops and stuff. I ended up buying this nylon-string Ovation. I think it was maybe designed for that town, you know? Because that gets you back to a sort of Willie Nelson kind of vibe. It's a plug-in thin body model and that's what you hear me playing on this song – it's got that DI immediacy to it."

ENEMIES

"What's interesting about this song is that we did a Phil Spector-style thing. Four of us were all playing acoustics at the same time. We gave that a double or a fucking triple track or something, sort of like the Wall Of Sound. That song naturally had this Spector stomp. At that point, you say: 'Okay, should we go there? Should we do the thing?' And I was like: 'Fuck it, let's just do it'. We included this big peak coming out of the bridge that we totally nicked from Spector. That didn't come from me, that came down as a suggestion from a dude on the record by the name of Russ Pahl."

FUN FOR THE MASSES

"Russ did some wonderful work on the pedal steel on this song. He took an amazing fucking solo and played it on his signature model, a Show Pro. It's got some cool stuff about it, like built-in fuzz. He's got this whole effects loop where he doesn't give a dry signal. He was using a Mellotron pedal and doing these things with the steel that made it sound like an organ. There's also a high atmospheric thing and I think he had a spinning speaker pedal where it suddenly starts to read and track in a way that's not like a pedal steel – it sounds sort of like a synthesiser or something you can't quite pinpoint."

IN HEAVEN MAKING LOVE

"On this, we used a Silver Sparkle Fender Custom Shop Telecaster with a B-Bender. It was played by the great Kenny Vaughan. You can hear all of the breaks on that guitar – and that's during the bulk of the song. When it came to the solo, we switched over to a big old jazz-box thing, an old Epiphone. I think it's called an Epiphone Zephyr Regent, and that guitar had flatwound strings. The way that I achieved that slapback sound was to put the whole track through slapback. I put the whole mix through a Studer tape deck, not a plugin. That's why the guitar has that authentic Sun Studio vibe."

***Dixie Blur* is out 6 March on Bella Union.**

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

TWO DAY COMA
Happy For Now

The Bristol-based foursome's first single since 2019 LP *A Certain Shade Of Blue*. Expect characterful vocals by Tom Harris underpinned by jangly, offset tones. This is indie at its finest.

SAM FENDER
Hold Out

The BRIT Awards' 2019 Critics' Choice winner Sam Fender steps ever closer to becoming the UK's answer to Springsteen. Chordal guitar work opens things up before leading into chorus-drenched arpeggios.

THE 1975
The Birthday Party

One of the world's biggest bands return with another genre-bender from forthcoming LP *Notes On A Conditional Form*. Banjo lines meet acoustic guitars, with Matt Healy's vocals switching from sweet to rambling.

TAME IMPALA
Breathe Deeper

Kevin Parker's fourth LP is one of the most anticipated of the year – and this track doesn't disappoint. Killer basslines and muted guitar make up the vibe. The outro features fuzzy guitars and slick synths.

BUZZARD BUZZARD BUZZARD
John Lennon Is My Jesus Christ

The Welsh rockers return with a campfire homage to John Lennon and Marc Bolan, among others. This track's video boasts choreographed dancers, an organ break and roller skaters. Is the glam-rock revival on?

ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER
Cars In Space

Oz's best new indie band return with this surf-inspired track, a Melbourne tonic that's ideal for washing away the winter blues. Aussie-accented vocals and guitars are piled high on top of each other throughout.

THE MAGIC GANG
Think

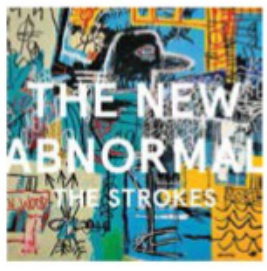
Now on Warner Records, The Magic Gang's comeback single explores uncharted territory with soul-infused horns and a homage to Northern Soul. Expect effervescent songwriting and nostalgic energy.

MURA MASA FT SLOWTHAI
Deal Wiv It

Full of aggressive, scuzzy Rickenbacker guitars and typically uncompromising vocals from Northampton rapper Slowthai, an early contender for one of the most dangerous and exciting tracks of 2020.

JOEL PATERSON
All My Loving

Paterson's rendition of The Beatles' *All My Loving* is a standout from his new Fab Four instrumental cover album, which features doublestops, Bigsby twang and sharp suits aplenty. Read more on p46.



THE STROKES
Bad Decisions

Casablancas and co are back with the second single from their long-awaited LP *The New Abnormal*, produced by Rick Rubin. It's heavily reminiscent of *Dancing With Myself*, for which Billy Idol earns a writing credit.

WORKING MEN'S CLUB
White Rooms and People

Working Men's Club's latest disco-funk bop sounds like Slaves *and* The Human League. They've already played with Mac Demarco – and are all set to play bigger stages with smooth singles such as this one.

JEFF PARKER
Go Away

Parker continues to push jazz in new and invigorating directions. This five-minute track from new record *Suite For Max Brown* features looping hip-hop drums and intricate, sweet guitar lines.

COMPETITION

WIN A D'ANGELICO EXCEL SS
WORTH £1,569

Founded in 1932, John D'Angelico's eponymous company began by producing exquisitely crafted hand-made archtops from his workshop in Little Italy, New York. Reborn under new ownership in 2011, today the historic brand offers a varied selection of guitars inspired by those original D'Angelico instruments, with production mainly taking place in Asia.

With lashings of Art Deco style, the Excel SS looks every bit the classic D'Angelico, but under the hood it's no pure jazzer. Equipped with a pair of Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers that can be coil-split via push/pull tone knobs, it also features gold hardware, which includes a set of Grover Super Rotomatic tuners, as well as mother-of-pearl inlay work, multi-ply bindings, ebony control knobs, an ivoroid-tipped three-position switch, and twin volume knobs.

The Excel SS's neck pickup never sacrifices articulation or nuance, and maintains a clear front to the notes at all times. While the in-between tones are also strong, especially when one or both pickups is coil-split, using the bridge on its own reveals the instrument's secret weapon, the diamond-encrusted switchblade beneath its fancy fur coat.

To enter this great competition, head to the link below and answer the following question. Good luck!

In which part of New York City was D'Angelico founded?

a) Hell's Kitchen **b)** Harlem **c)** Little Italy

Enter at: guitar.com/competitions
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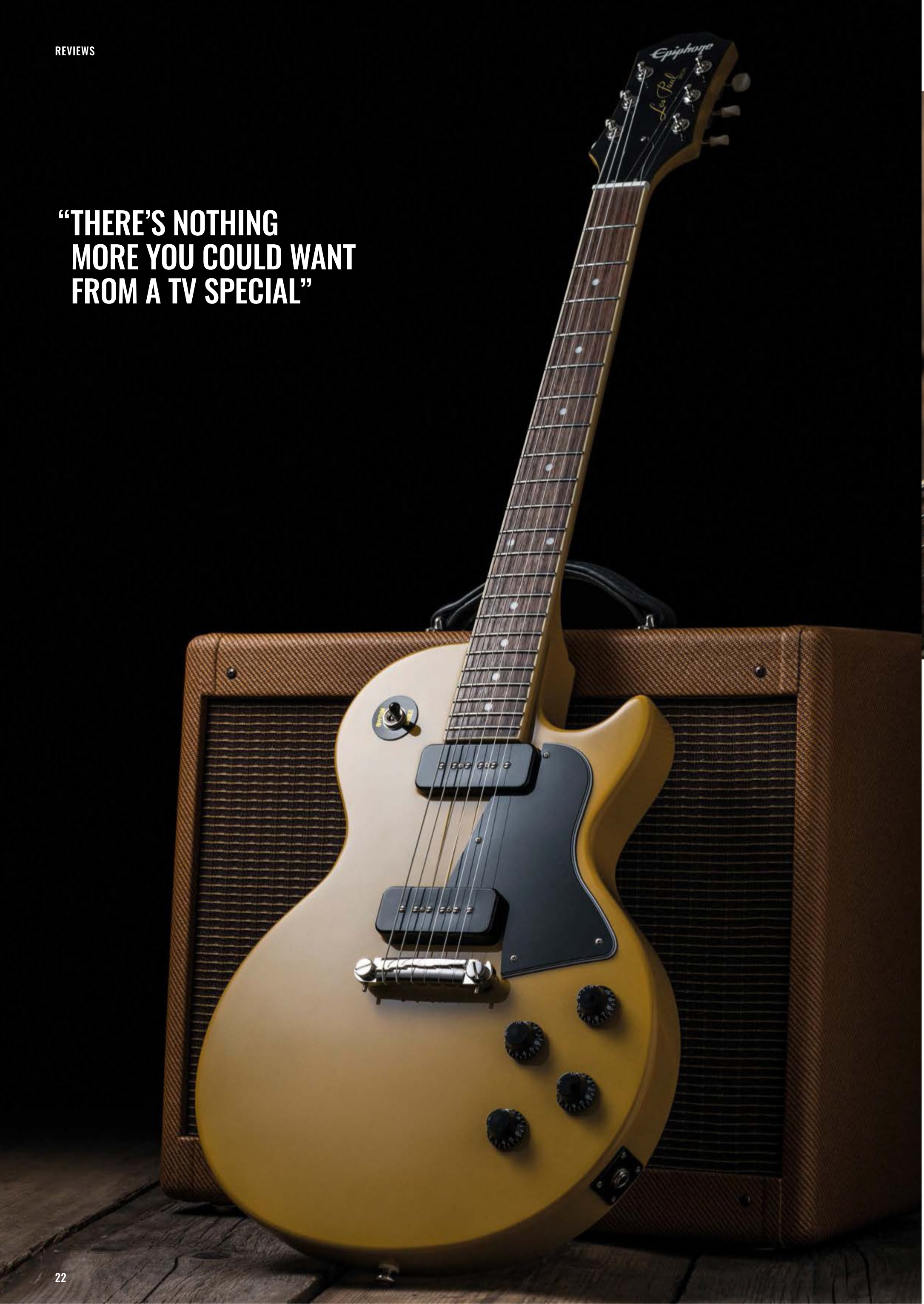
EPIPHONE INSPIRED BY GIBSON

THE BEST EPIPHONES EVER?

WORDS HUW PRICE

Are the upgraded Les Paul and SG models from Epiphone's new Inspired By Gibson line the best affordable electrics the brand has ever produced?

“THERE’S NOTHING MORE YOU COULD WANT FROM A TV SPECIAL”



Head start: the new 'Kalamazoo' headstock in all its glory

Wrap on: the Special has a compensated wrapover bridge

Soap star: the P-90 Pro pickups do a great job of translating the Special's acoustic tone

Gibson's new management demonstrated its willingness to listen and respond to customers last year when the brand's core line-up was totally overhauled and split into Original and Modern collections, finally giving fans the production-level vintage-vibed instruments they'd long asked for. Epiphone was next in line for a refresh and Winter NAMM 2020 saw the public debut of a range of new Inspired By Gibson models.

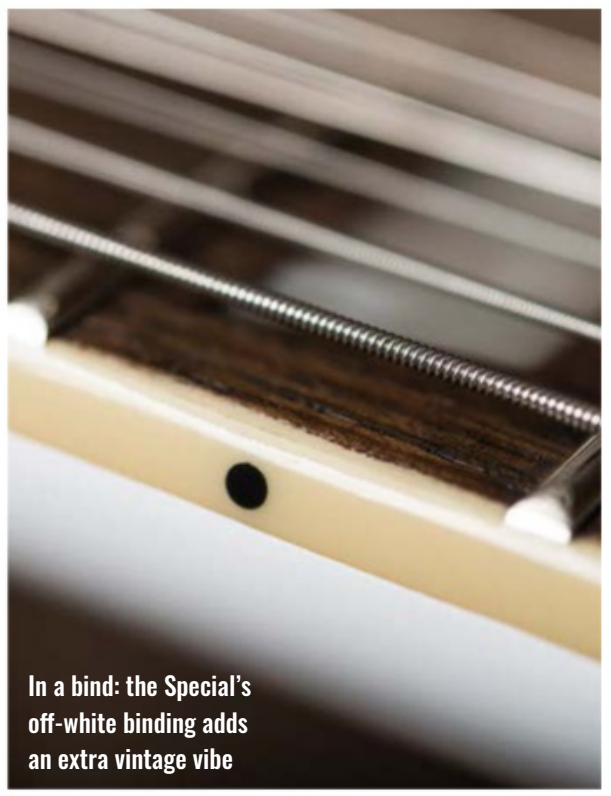
The strategy is pretty clear; Epiphone guitars in the Original Collection will be closer to their Gibson forebears than ever before, with vintage-style features and finishes, upgraded electronics with hand-wired CTS pots and in addition, Les Pauls and SGs will benefit from a headstock design Gibson is calling the 'Kalamazoo'.

For several decades, most Epiphone solidbodies have featured a headstock with the top corners of the 'open-book' outline missing, and many players have requested a design closer to the classic Gibson look. Such has been the demand, a whole subculture dedicated to Epiphone headstock conversions has sprung up – Google 'Epiphone headstock' and the search bar will autocomplete 'conversion'.

Epiphones had open-book headstocks long before Gibson acquired the company however, and in recent years, they've continued to be a feature of original Epiphone designs such as the Wildkat. So although the Kalamazoo headstock more closely resembles the classic Gibson outline, it's actually a historic Epiphone design. Either way, most people – us included – seem to think it's a massive improvement.

Other common features on the Original Collection guitars include Graph Tech nuts, nickel-plated hardware, new Epiphone Deluxe tuners with an 18:1 ratio and Indian laurel fretboards with a 12-inch radius. Time to take a deeper dive…

Hold tight: the tailpiece is locked tight rather than held by string tension


In a bind: the Special's off-white binding adds an extra vintage vibe

Hats off: The SG's top hat knobs have vintage-appropriate silver inserts

LES PAUL SPECIAL

You might not expect a modern budget version of a 1950s student model to have much of a 'wow' factor, but this £349 guitar has it in spades. The colour looks wonderful and with its grain-obscuring opaqueness and hint of olive green, the vibe is very much mid- rather than late-50s.

Vintage plastics obsessives will be pleased to note that the five-ply pickguard is equally impressive, with the upper layer of white thinner than the lower layer. We have an original Gibson guard on hand to compare and Epiphone's attention to detail is admirable. The knobs and P-90 Pro pickup covers are similarly vintage in style and although we're less enamoured with the truss-rod cover and textured rear cover plates, these are very minor details.

Where it really counts, the specs are spot on. The Special has a non-weight relieved mahogany body and a mahogany neck, and the neck profile is fat. As you might expect given the huge gulf in price, it lacks some of the subtlety and finesse of an authentic 1950s instrument, but it feels pretty great nonetheless.

The Lightning Bar wrapover bridge may not be a 1950s feature but many will welcome it. Gibson actually introduced this style of bridge in the early 1960s, but with one schoolboy error. For some reason Gibson's new wrapover featured intonation compensation for wound G strings, which was arguably worse than having no compensation at all – by that time most of the world had moved onto a plain G.

Here that error is rectified and the use of a compensated bridge has prompted this model's designers to install the bushings equidistant from the bridge pickup. Consequently, unlike on vintage LP Specials, the bridge sits parallel to the pickup.

The intonation needs fine adjustment and the treble side has to be jacked backwards using the integral grub screw – the outcome is pretty accurate, but gives a slightly odd look because the bridge ends up angled with the treble side slightly further away from the bridge pickup than the bass side. That said, guitars are quirky devices and results may vary.

SG STANDARD '61

Alpine White makes for the most visually striking SGs and the very slightly off-white hue here really helps this Epiphone look the part. The pearloid marker dots look somewhat nondescript, but here we have something more convincingly pearl-like for the trapezoid inlays and headstock crown.

Single-ring tulip buttons are fitted to the Deluxe tuners and the colour looks very good. The fretboard gets off-white binding too, but no fret nibs. As with the Les Paul Special's wrapover, the tailpiece is locked tight on its bolt rather than held in place merely by string tension, and there's no tilt whatsoever.

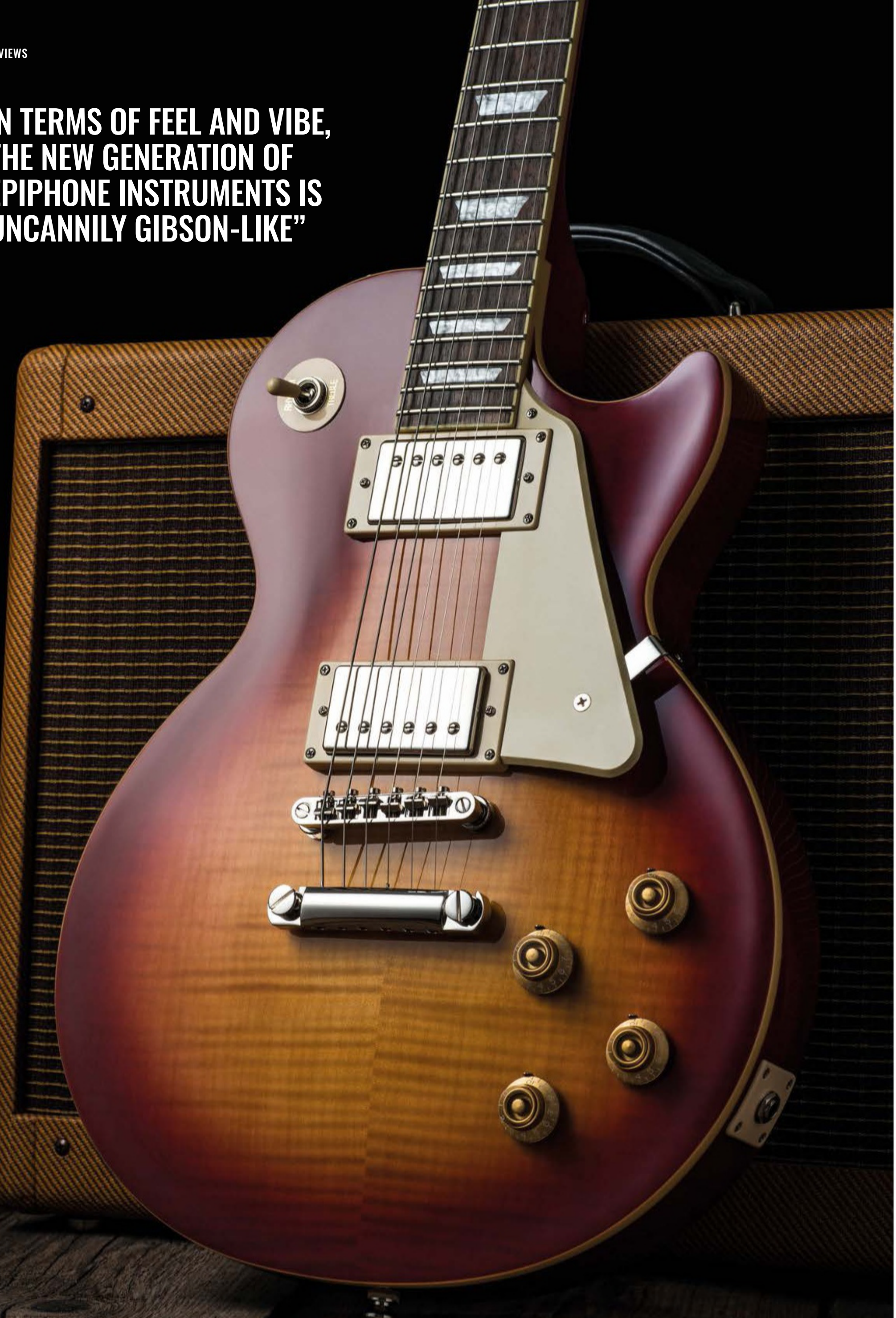
This time the designers have opted for a flatter 'D' profile that's described as a 60s Slim Taper. While the Les Paul Special's neck gets close to vintage spec, on the SG Epiphone has absolutely nailed it.

LES PAUL STANDARD 50S

Yet again, this is a serious stab at providing players with vintage looks and playing feel at an affordable price. You get subtle maple figuring under an attractively toned Heritage Cherry Sunburst finish, 50s-style narrow binding in the cutaway and a very substantial neck.

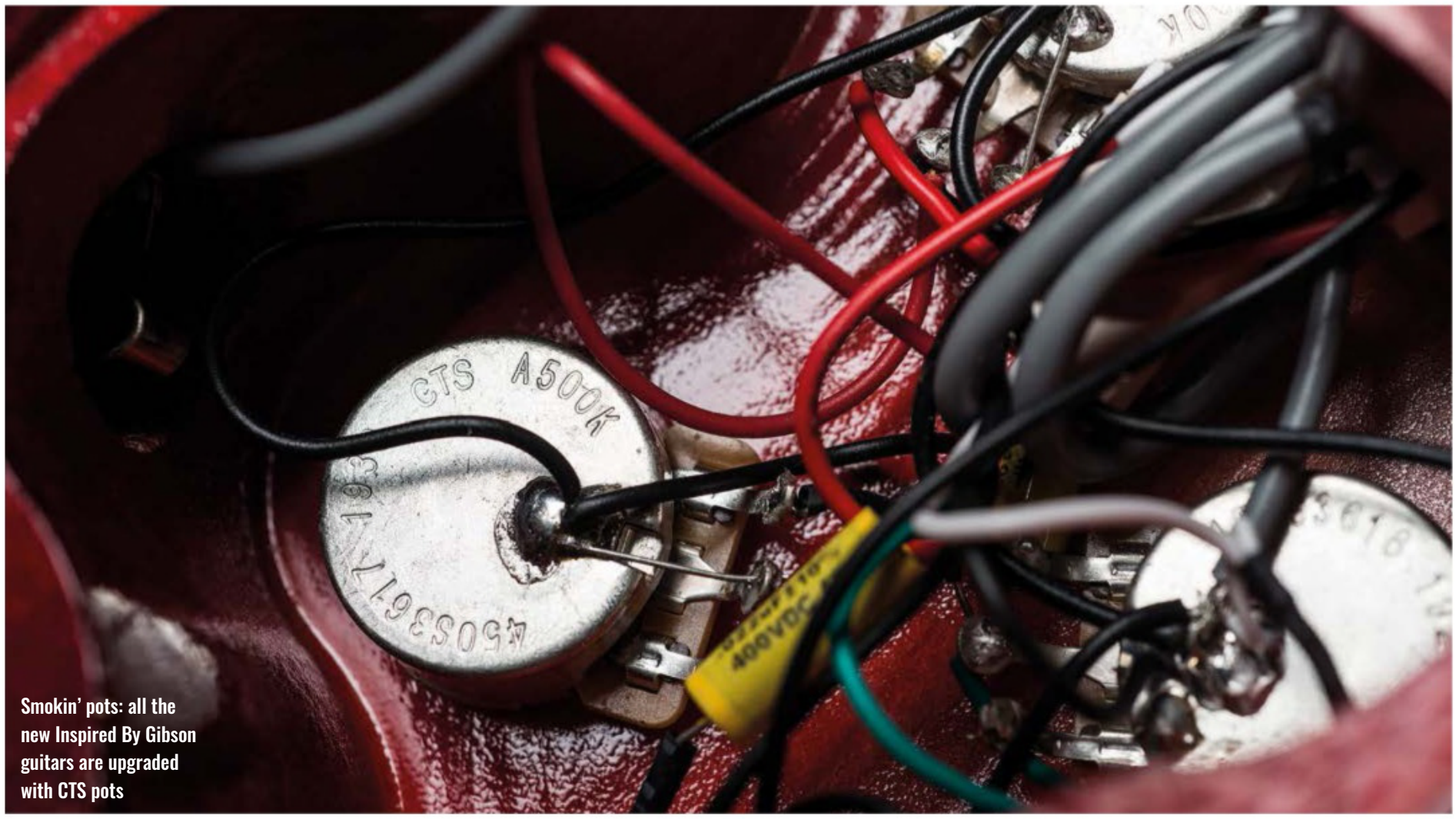
"THE SG SPECIAL IS AN ABSOLUTE BLAST TO PLAY AND A WILD AND THRILLING RIDE"

“IN TERMS OF FEEL AND VIBE, THE NEW GENERATION OF EPIPHONE INSTRUMENTS IS UNCANNILY GIBSON-LIKE”



Laurel hardy: all the fingerboards are made of Indian laurel

Truss up: Gone is the 'Gibson' legend from the truss-rod cover



Smokin' pots: all the new Inspired By Gibson guitars are upgraded with CTS pots

If you're familiar with vintage Gibson profiles, the feel is far closer to the necks that left the factory in late 1957 and '58 than the more refined profiles of 1959. If you're looking for something slimmer then that's where the Standard 60s comes in.

The body is made from multiple pieces of mahogany, but you can only see join lines on the sides, because they're hidden beneath a body-sized sheet of mahogany veneer. Impressively, the mahogany neck is set into the body with a long tenon joint – a desirable vintage feature you won't even find on some USA-made Gibsons.

The Standard comes equipped with Epiphone's ProBucker humbuckers, which are made with 18 per cent nickel silver bases and covers just like early PAFs. The bobbins are the same shape and size as Gibson units and the ProBuckers also feature sand-cast alnico II magnets with vacuum wax potted coils and four-conductor wire.

IN USE

Time to plug in, and we turn first to the most affordable guitar of the three. Straight off the bat, the Special's P-90 Pro soapbars have more late- than early-50s treble characteristics, but the extra cut is no bad thing. They also capture the effortless sustain, harmonic complexity and tonal balance we hear unplugged.

It's one of those guitars you have to force yourself to put down because it sounds wonderful and has no discernible compromises. If you don't like fat necks, you probably won't like this one, but we find its playability hard to fault and overall, we're blown away.

With its growl, chime, snarl, jazzy cleans and quacking country tones, there's nothing more you could want from a TV Special. When you factor in the remarkably affordable price, it's a strong early contender for 2020's Gear Of The Year awards.

The SG is every bit as resonant as the Special, but the lighter weight and different bridge configuration make it livelier, brighter and quicker to respond. The Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers have real grunt and can easily overdrive an amp, but the brightness and clarity demonstrates that they're not overwound and plenty of bite and note articulation is retained.

To really nail that mid-late 60s SG tone, we would like a touch more girth in the

Coronation: the SG headstock features the iconic Gibson crown inlay

Pickup artist: the ProBucker pickups sound remarkable

mids and maybe softer treble, but we're able to get into the ballpark with some amp tweaking. Although this SG doesn't quite have the velvety woodiness of the very finest examples of the breed, it's still an absolute blast to play and a rather wild and thrilling ride.

Given the sheer amount of these things that Gibson has sold over the years, any major update to the Epiphone Les Paul Standard must be a big deal for the company. And the good news is that the third guitar of our power-trio is as impressive as its siblings when plugged in.

We've often noted that vintage Les Pauls are incredibly versatile guitars, but some modern Lesters can be frustrating one trick ponies if their pickups aren't up to it. The reality is that few modern PAF-style pickups are, and this is why the ProBuckers are so damn impressive. In fact, we actually pull them out of the body to check that a set of top-dollar units hasn't been fitted in the guitar by mistake!

The qualities we associate with vintage PAFs are very much in evidence here and the ProBuckers prove to be a little more vocal and articulate than the SG's Alnico Classic Pros. The ProBuckers are sensitive, clear and in no way deficient in treble response – and just like genuine PAFs, when an overdriven amp is dialled in for the neck pickup, the bridge benefits from having its tone control rolled back slightly.

Sustain and fatness abound, but the tone controls work much like those of vintage LP Standards, with very little loss of clarity when you turn the volume down and no disappearing B and E strings when the tone controls are rolled back fully. By any measure this is an impressive 1950s-inspired Les Paul, and you will struggle to find anything better at this price.

Nobody can see the front of a headstock when they're playing a guitar and strictly in terms of feel and vibe, the new generation of Epiphone instruments is uncannily Gibson-like. In fact, these guitars are so good they're in danger of cannibalising sales from the more affordable end of the Gibson USA line – we even prefer the binding Epiphone is using here to the tangerine stuff we see on so many Gibsons.

Where there are compromises, they're largely cosmetic or easily rectifiable – for instance, if truss-rod cover bevels and textured plastic bother you, or if you must have 50s-style wiring. But regardless, with improved binding scraping and fret-end dressing, all three of our review guitars would come very close to scoring perfect 10s. G

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KEY FEATURES

LES PAUL SPECIAL
PRICE £349
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid mahogany body, set mahogany neck with 'Vintage 50s' profile, bound Indian laurel fretboard with 12" radius, pearloid dot markers, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE Lightning Bar wrapover bridge, Epiphone Vintage Deluxe 18:1 tuners with 'ivory' buttons
ELECTRONICS 2x P-90 Pro soapbar pickups, 2x volume and tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.7mm
NECK WIDTH 42.5mm at nut, 53.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.1mm at first fret, 26.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.6mm at nut, 50.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.67lb/3.48kg
FINISH TV Yellow only
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT epiphone.com

9/10 **For looks, playability, tone and sheer vintage vibe, this is the no-brainer purchase of the year so far**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Harley Benton SC-450 P90 GT £125, Vintage V132 Reissued £349, Gordon Smith GS2 from £700

KEY FEATURES

SG STANDARD '61
PRICE £399
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid mahogany body, set mahogany neck with '60s Slim Taper' profile, bound Indian laurel fretboard with 12" radius, pearloid trapezoid inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE LockTone ABR Tune-o-matic bridge, stopbar tailpiece, Epiphone Vintage Deluxe 18:1 tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Alnico Classic Pro humbucking pickups, 2x volume and tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.7mm
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.1mm at first fret, 22.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.9mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.38lb/3.35kg
FINISH Alpine White (as reviewed), Ebony, Heritage Cherry
LEFT-HANDERS No

9/10 **This Standard '61 captures the feel of a mid-60s Gibson SG and delivers in the tone stakes, too**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage VS6 Reissued £379, Yamaha Revstar RS320 £299, LTD Viper-256 £383

KEY FEATURES

LES PAUL STANDARD 50S
PRICE £549
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid mahogany body with maple cap and cream binding, long tenon set mahogany neck, bound Indian laurel fretboard with 12" radius, pearloid trapezoid inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE LockTone ABR Tune-o-matic bridge, stopbar tailpiece, Epiphone Vintage Deluxe 18:1 tuners
ELECTRONICS ProBucker-2 (neck) & ProBucker-3 (bridge) humbucking pickups, 2x volume and tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.7mm
NECK WIDTH 42.6mm at nut, 53.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.8mm at first fret, 26.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
WEIGHT 9.39lb/4.26kg
FINISH Heritage Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), Metallic Gold, Vintage Sunburst
LEFT-HANDERS No

9/10 **A successful attempt to create an affordable Les Paul with 50s specs, but the pickups really steal the show**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS SE 245 Standard £475, Tokai UALS48 AAA LD £499, Eastman SB59 £1,599

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2 Les Paul Special in TV Yellow

3 Flying V in Ebony

4 Les Paul 50s in Heritage Cherry Sunburst

GETTING THE BRAND BACK TOGETHER

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

It's been a long time since you could say that Epiphone caused a buzz at NAMM, but back at January's show, the overhaul of the brand was all anyone could talk about in the hotel bars of Anaheim. We spoke to some of the key people involved about what it all means…

There's an argument to be made that of all the myriad problems Gibson had before its high-profile bankruptcy in 2018, Epiphone wasn't one of them. Even when the internet was queuing up to take shots at Gibson for everything from build quality, to design choices and pricing, Epiphone was still selling a hell of a lot of guitars.

And yet, Epiphone never really got a lot of love. Despite a starring role in the jazz era and being one of the most visible and audible guitar brands of the British beat boom, modern-day Epiphones had the reputation of being the guitar you bought because you couldn't afford a Gibson – and unlike budget offerings from other brands, the headstock design used on most of Epiphone's Gibson-derived models made sure that even from the back of the room, everyone could see that you weren't playing the 'real' thing.

Epiphone had become known as a stop-off rather than a destination, and this was clearly a perception that Gibson's new management wanted to change as they began to overhaul the brand for 2020, and to that it looked at its recent success with its core product line.

"Epiphone is synonymous with being very authentic but also being very accessible for people. So, we know we've got momentum and energy on the Gibson side, so why wouldn't we take that energy and bring it to the Inspired by Gibson range?" Gibson CEO JC Curleigh told us, shortly after the new Epiphone range was revealed at NAMM 2020.

It's a simple plan, but an eminently sensible one – mirror what worked so well with Gibson at NAMM 2019, only at a more affordable price-point with an Epiphone badge on the headstock. This meant creating the 'Inspired by Gibson' line, with the Original Collection the home for models with vintage-style

finishes and specifications, and the Modern Collection the space for forward-looking innovation.

"I think it's less about Epiphone shadowing Gibson, and more about what our Epiphone and Gibson fans were saying to us," counters JC. "Like, 'Hey, if you're going to do Originals, *really* do Originals. Be true to that era and go back to what you did then.' So that's what we did with Gibson, and now we're doing it with the Originals in the Inspired By collection."

HEAD HONCHO

The evidence of this desire to *really* do things right can be found in everything from the neck shapes to the upgraded CTS pots, to the colour choices, and even the brand new Deluxe tuners, but ultimately that headstock is what's dominated the conversation about these new guitars – as Gibson knew it would.

"What I've really learned to appreciate and love about our fanbase is that they pay attention to detail," notes JC. "And so when we say 'Original', 'Historic', 'Modern' or 'Inspired by', we have to reflect that in the details of our guitars. And by paying attention to the headstock again, and the craftsmanship around that… it all really matters."

Referring to the new design as the 'Kalamazoo' headstock is evocative, of course, and the name was chosen to reflect a pivotal moment in the history of two iconic American brands.

"The Kalamazoo headstock harkens back to Epiphone being acquired by Gibson in 1957," says Aljon Go, Epiphone's Product Manager. "After that, both Gibson and Epiphone guitars were made side-by-side in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This early-60s headstock with the 'open book' has actually been used on our Wildkat guitar for many years, but with the badge – so it's been out there, people just never knew!"

Another interesting wrinkle in the Epiphone relaunch is the fact that the company is making production guitars in the USA again for the first time in decades – exemplified first by the brand new USA Texan. This is the flipside of what's being done to make the affordable Chinese-made guitars more attractive – a reminder that Epiphone is a brand with its own rich history and musical prestige, far beyond the budget brand that it has become known as today.

"I actually love the notion of the Texan being made in the USA – there's just so much heritage and history there," JC enthuses. "Whether it's Peter Frampton or Paul McCartney, it's just amazing. I think we're in that position now with Epiphone where it is one of the most authentic brands out there, so we have to ensure that we're true to that promise. So if you're going to invest in the guitar that Paul McCartney wrote *Yesterday* on, in the Texan, expect for it to be at *that* price point and quality.

"I grew up in a musical family, and my mother always played Epiphone, so that's been in our house all my life," the CEO reveals. "So to me, Epiphone has always been synonymous with engaging in music. So combining the quality, build and craftsmanship, with what we can do to inspire it from the Gibson side, is the perfect combination."

5 SG Standard '61 Maestro Vibrola in Vintage Cherry

6 Firebird in Vintage Sunburst

7 Explorer in Ebony

8 SG Special (P-90) in Faded Pelham Blue

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BRIAN FALLON

Whether fronting The Gaslight Anthem or stepping out as a troubadour, Brian Fallon has spent the past 15 years pursuing blue-collar authenticity in both his songwriting and guitar playing. As he prepares to share his third solo album, *Local Honey,* we sit down with the New Jersey native to find out how stripping things back and raising his strap has led him to new musical pastures

WORDS HUW BAINES **PORTRAITS** ELEANOR JANE

OPPOSITE Fallon performing live at the Union Chapel, London, in 2019

Delicate fingerpicking is possible even when you have tattooed knuckles. Just ask Brian Fallon. Sat in the café of London's Rough Trade East record store, swaddled in a heavy green coat to shield him from the January cold, the New Jersey native talks animatedly about taking guitar lessons again. "I wanted to get better, for myself," he says. "I wanted to be able to do things I couldn't do before."

Fallon's fingerpicking skills came in handy while working on *Local Honey*, his third solo album in five years since stepping away from The Gaslight Anthem, the slash-and-burn punk 'n' roll band with which he made his name. It's a low-lit Americana record, heavy on atmosphere and light on the punchy soul-indebted stomp of earlier releases *Painkillers* and *Sleepwalkers*.

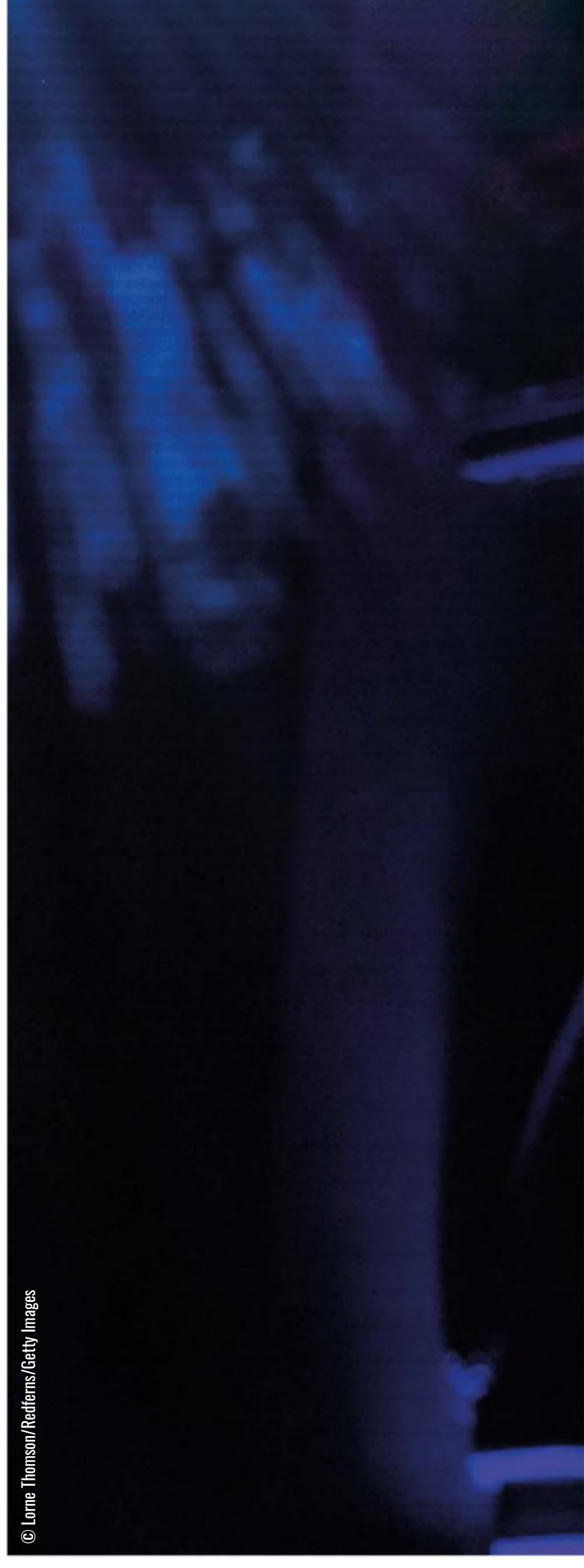
After embarking on an acoustic tour dubbed Songs From The Hymnal in 2018, Fallon realised that by breaking down his old songs to their constituent parts he had unlocked in them something new. "I didn't know at the time that it would affect the writing of *Local Honey*," he says. "I just wanted to try and tour like that. I'd never done it. It ended up showing me that there's this whole other side – you can carry a song with minimalistic instrumentation and still make it equally as powerful as it would be with a band."

The LP holds a mirror up to who Fallon is right now: he's 40, married with two kids, has a home to maintain – and has bags under his eyes. The acoustic tour saw him break out many favourites from his former band but, crucially, he played them from a new vantage point.

Paring back *Great Expectations*, the opening salvo from The Gaslight Anthem's most celebrated album, *The '59 Sound*, allowed crowds to see a man who is rapidly approaching middle age hold a conversation with a younger version of himself, a rockstar that only exists in photographs. *Local Honey* picks up where the tour left off.

"When he wrote *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right*, Bob Dylan said he wasn't old enough to sing it," says Fallon. "He said that about himself. Experience puts weight into your voice. Tom Waits could sing a nursery rhyme – as soon as he opens his mouth there's that weight to it. When you're young, you don't have that experience pushing behind you. When you get older and you've seen a lot, it's almost as if you don't have to force it out anymore. It's there all the time."

Working with producer Peter Katis – whose collaborations with The National, Interpol, and Frightened Rabbit have shown that he knows a thing or two about wringing meaning from sparse rock records – Fallon set about refining songs that capture the peculiar blend of warmth, sadness and ennui that accompanies growing older.



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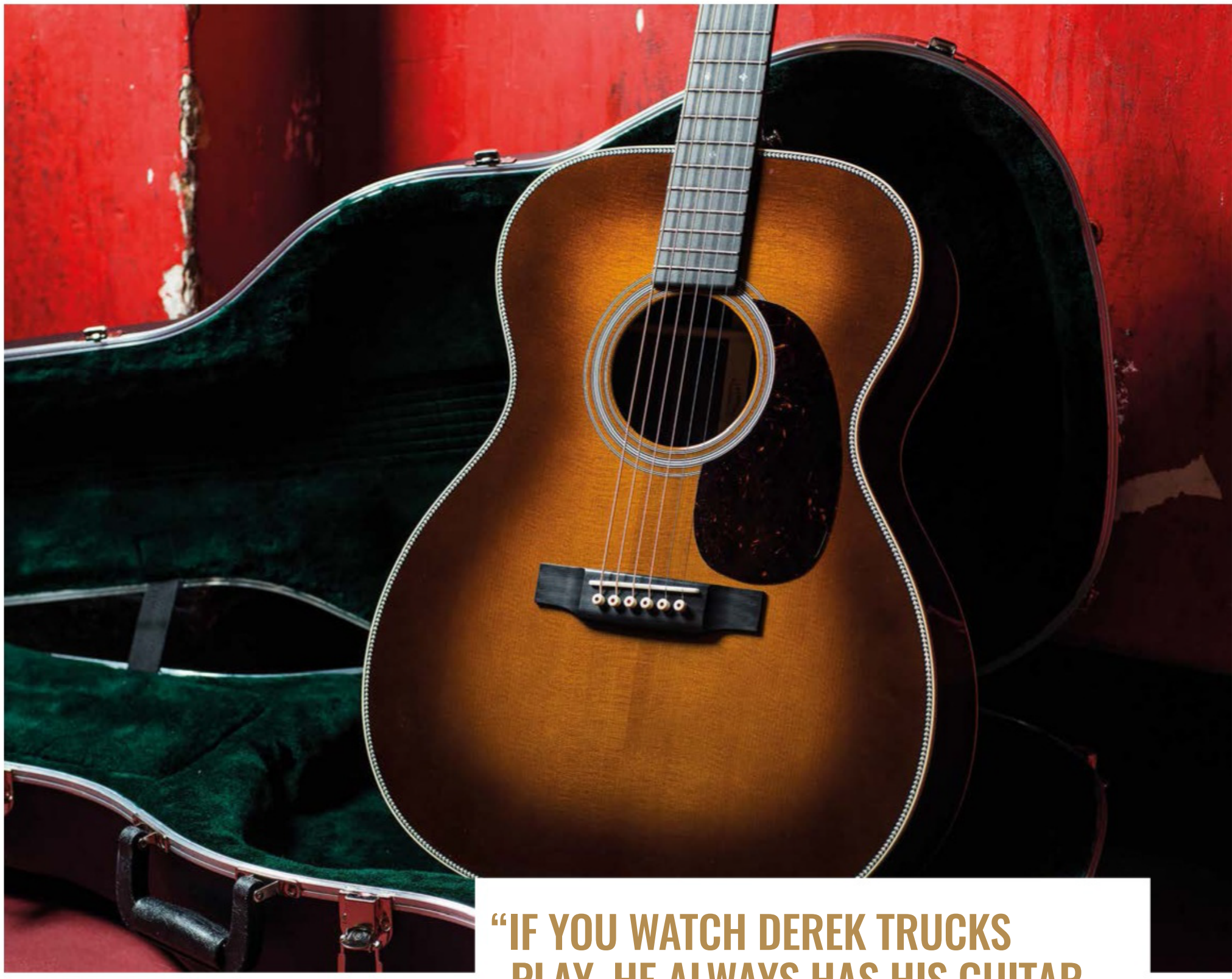
The Waits comparison is apt, up to a point. At several points throughout *Local Honey,* Fallon appears to be dredging things up from within, but they're communicated with only a dash of the booze-sodden abandon and sentimentality that characterised Waits' early 1970s work. Fallon's voice has never been this rich or measured, but it's also never been given this much room to breathe, and that additional space lends the tracks a more intimate quality than we've come to expect from the singer. "A lot of that was Peter," he says. "He was like: 'Just sing it like you're saying it. You don't have to push.'"

To accentuate this contemplative aspect of *Local Honey*, the album's palette is considered and largely acoustic. Fallon played his Martin 00-42, a custom model he picked up at Russo Music in Asbury Park, New Jersey, throughout the recording. On the electric side, he turned to his Telecaster, complemented by a simple setup that helped to bring the entire thing together as a single piece: a Tube Screamer, a Fulltone Solid State Tape Echo, and a 1966 Fender Deluxe Reverb amp. "You get a sound going, get a feel," he says. "And then the instruments become characters in the record."



SINGLE CUTTING

Telecasters have played a starring role throughout Fallon's career, with a cavalcade of Les Pauls filling gritty supporting parts. Back in the Gaslight days, he'd switch between the two, laying down chunky rhythm lines to drive home the band's massive vocal hooks and the soaring leads of guitarist Alex Rosamilia. But there have been changes on that front too, and like any self-respecting 40-year-old, it's a comfort thing: Fallon has short arms and wide shoulders, so his days as a gunslinger, guitar cinched below his hips, are over.

"I hurt my arm doing that," he says. "I had to go to physical therapy. I twisted a nerve and it really caused problems. Now I play the lightest guitars I can find. I play Les Pauls when I'm sitting down. Live, I try to play a Telecaster and play it high and off to the side.

"You know who does that? If you watch Derek Trucks play, he always has it off to the side. You have to sit naturally with the guitar. It's not natural to play like Slash unless you have really long arms. If you watch Sturgill Simpson, that Tele's way up high. You need to be able to move but you have to keep this wrist straight. It's mid-waist, between your chest and your hip. That's kind of where it should be."

The temptation on *Local Honey*, though, was to fall back on old habits in order to get the job done.

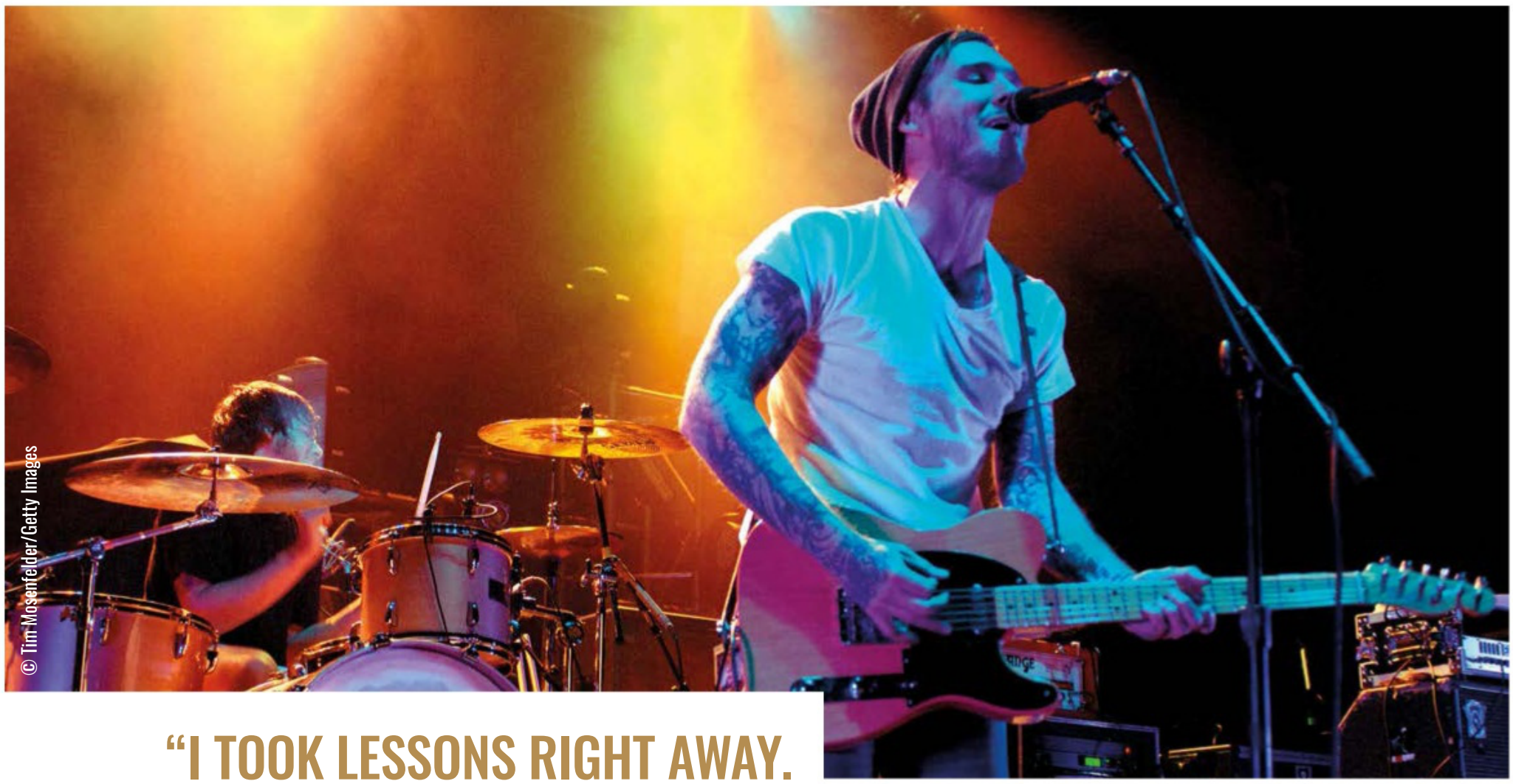
"IF YOU WATCH DEREK TRUCKS PLAY, HE ALWAYS HAS HIS GUITAR OFF TO THE SIDE. YOU HAVE TO SIT NATURALLY WITH THE GUITAR. IT'S NOT NATURAL TO PLAY LIKE SLASH, UNLESS YOU HAVE LONG ARMS"

Wisdom is hard-earned but it only really matters if you have the good sense to listen to it. These are some of the most emotionally honest songs of Fallon's career but many of them, such as the skipping *21 Days*, could easily have been retrofitted to include some crowd-pleasing pyrotechnics.

The devil on any rocker's shoulder will always ask to throw in a few solos, a little more of a rolling Tom Petty gait here and there, or maybe a wash of feedback to act as a suit of armour. "In the past, I would have done that," says Fallon. "With this one, I was comfortable just letting it happen. I knew I had to try something different. For me to feel like I took a stand would be to not use the same trick that I would have in the past. I had to open it up and strip it back, because that's the one thing I hadn't done before."

ABOVE When it comes to acoustics, Fallon is a Martin man, though this sunburst model was borrowed for the tour

OPPOSITE A nerve injury caused Fallon to reconsider the way he plays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"I TOOK LESSONS RIGHT AWAY. I WASN'T STUPID. I WAS LIKE: 'I'M NOT FIGURING THIS OUT BY MYSELF.' I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE GUY WHO'S NOT AFRAID TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS"

ABOVE Blue-collar glory: Fallon fronting The Gaslight Anthem in 2008

OPPOSITE Fallon's solo career is the primary focus right now

GREETINGS FROM RED BANK, N.J.

Discussing what Fallon has done before is complicated. He was born in Red Bank, New Jersey, a town hugging the Navesink – a river he'd later immortalise in the Gaslight Anthem song *The Navesink Banks* – and spent the second half of his childhood 60 miles or so inland in Hackettstown. He longed for the shore, where there were lights and sounds and people and dancing.

As a kid out to unlock that world, his first guitar was a Charvel/Jackson Strat copy. "Like a hundred bucks. A terrible guitar," he remembers. "I took lessons right away. I wasn't stupid. I was like: 'I'm not figuring this out by myself.' I've always been the guy who's not afraid to ask for directions."

When he was a teenager, he took beatings from the local meatheads, who disliked his mohawk. He put on shows at Elks Lodges and American Legion Halls, in an effort to foster something of a scene in a town where there was nothing going on. "You'd rent the venues out and throw shows with your friends' bands," he says. "Nobody would book you. When we were starting out, Live Nation wasn't calling up being like: 'Hey, we wanna give you a show!' You had to do it all yourself."

Everything changed when The Gaslight Anthem formed in 2006. Fallon was the living embodiment of a Bruce Springsteen song – a blue-collar guy with six strings and nothing to lose – and managed to strike a chord with a generation of punk kids who were after a little wistfulness to go with their power chords.

The band's rollicking debut LP, *Sink Or Swim*, was released by local label XOXO Records in 2007, and Fallon wrote songs for its blockbuster follow up, *The '59 Sound*, during lunch breaks at his construction job.

Soon after, in 2009, The Boss joined The Gaslight Anthem on stage at Glastonbury. A year later, Fallon returned the favour, performing a rabble-rousing version of *Born In The USA* classic *No Surrender* with the E Street Band at London's Hyde Park. Then, like clockwork, the backlash started.

Fallon was cast by sections of the press as inauthentic, a grifter with a New Jersey soul and a record collection to match. On the band's following three records, *American Slang*, *Handwritten*, and *Get Hurt*, great songs were swallowed by the 'dime-store Springsteen' narrative that surrounded their author. In 2015, Gaslight pressed self-destruct.

As a solo artist, though, Fallon has resolutely refused to change his approach. Perhaps it's that wisdom thing again, but he seems more settled now. The *Local Honey* standout *Vincent*, for example, is an acoustic lament that recalls Don McLean in its title and references Dolly Parton's *Jolene* in its lyrics.

"That's what I feel like I am," says Fallon, pointing at the floor of the café, a collage of album sleeves. "But also books and TV shows, people, and places I've been. I feel like that's what makes me up. Everybody has influences, even if a lot of people pretend they don't. I'm not about trying to be original with every new thing. I'm not like: 'I was born fully formed with all my ideas and I didn't get this from anybody.'"

In 2018, as Fallon was beginning to conceptualise his next solo move, The Gaslight Anthem regrouped to tour *The '59 Sound* in its entirety to celebrate the LP's 10th birthday. The experience was validating at times but also steeled Fallon's resolve to carry on under his own steam. The run featured dates on the east coast of the US, as well as in the UK and Europe, but it stirred up some complicated emotions.

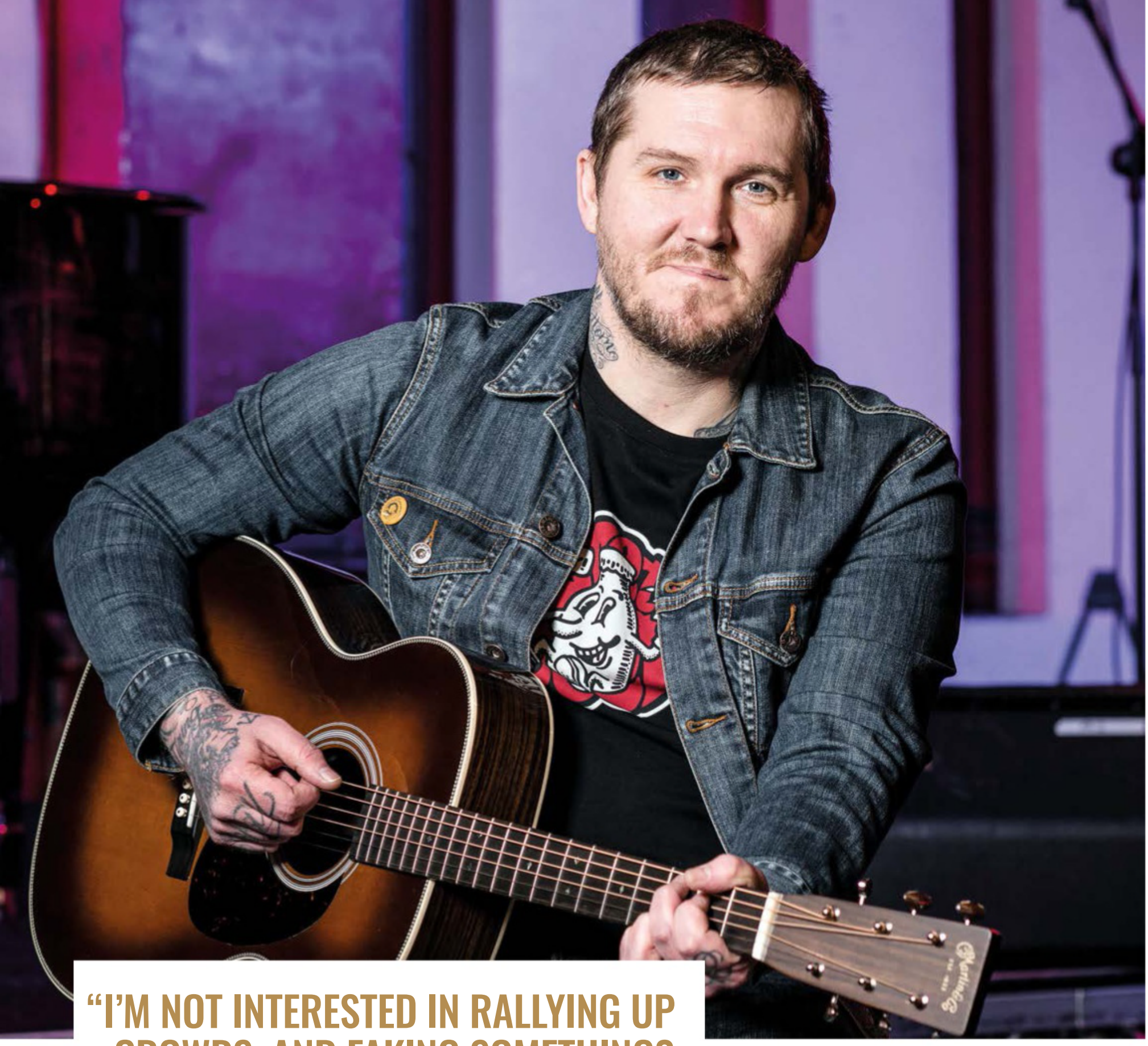
"It was not *fun*," he says – with emphasis. "It was a mixture of things. It was like a melting pot. There were some parts that were awesome. During [the tours for] *American Slang* and *Handwritten* especially, there was so much press that was so sarcastic and everything was such an annoyance to me. I felt like people were trying to annoy me from the time I woke up to the time I went to bed. I was so pissed about it that I never got a chance to actually enjoy the fans.

"So [the reunion tour] gave me the chance to play those songs and not be pissed. I didn't care what the press said because we weren't doing it for them. We were doing it for the fans and for us. That felt really good. The stressful part was that a lot of my head, honestly, was somewhere else musically."

The Gaslight Anthem didn't make it as far as the West Coast, and turned down some serious money to play a big festival show with a band they admired. "I wanted to be doing this other thing," says Fallon. "If I'd have gone to the West Coast, you might as well have stuck your hand up the back of my shirt and made me a puppet – that's what you'd be getting. I did everything I could do. The whole thing with The Gaslight Anthem was based on truth and heart, and the utmost meaning. We meant everything."

During the *Songs From The Hymnal* run, Fallon was supported by Craig Finn. Those hoping for more Gaslight shows might have noted the manner in which Finn has been able to balance his budding solo career with semi-regular blowouts fronting his cult bar-room rock band The Hold Steady. Fallon thought about it too – but not for long.

"He's able to switch back and forth, and it drives me crazy," says Fallon. "I asked him on the tour: 'How do you do that?' It's such a different energy. But for him, it might not be. He might be coming from a different place. I think Craig is always Craig. I feel like I've changed a lot as a person in a different way.



"I'M NOT INTERESTED IN RALLYING UP CROWDS. AND FAKING SOMETHING? I'D RATHER BE DEAD THAN FAKE. THAT'S WHERE I'M REAL PUNK. YOU CAN'T LIE TO THE PEOPLE."

"I could not write the same songs that I wrote then. I'm not the same person. It doesn't mean I don't like those songs. I do. But 27-year-old me and 40-year-old me would probably not hang out. I'm not the kind of person who's interested in rallying up crowds. I still go to shows where people do that and I think it's cool but I can no longer do it. It's not in my heart. I don't know why, it's just not. And faking something? I'd rather be dead than fake. That's where I'm real punk. You can't lie to the people."

SURE THINGS

Fallon seems sure of a lot these days. He doesn't like humbuckers on his Telecaster and he doesn't need to throw the kitchen sink at songs anymore. *Local Honey* has helped to set in stone many things that *Painkillers* and *Sleepwalkers* only pinned down occasionally.

The new album is full of empty spaces and moments of calm that Fallon has seldom entertained in the past, and it all works because of his conviction. "You use a blender for blending, you use a microwave for microwaving, and a pot for cooking," he says. "Use the thing for what it's designed for. I don't want to plug in 15 Moog synthesisers. Just give me the Telecaster. Give me the P-90 Les Paul. They sound good."

About 15 years into a career that has long provided solace to dreamers in jean jackets and beat-up Chuck Taylors, Fallon is content to walk where he wants. He hopes his fans will let him do his own thing. "The people who heard *Sink Or Swim* when it was written are now 40 and older, too," he says. "People understand. They've grown up too. They know you change."

There is something in his voice that betrays the belief that even the most ardent fan of The Gaslight Anthem can accept the truth in that. The glowering punk on the sleeve of *The '59 Sound* is who Brian Fallon was. *Local Honey* is who Brian Fallon is. To pretend otherwise is to die. "I've listened to too much Fugazi, that's the problem," he says, laughing. "I can't fake it."

Brian Fallon's *Local Honey* is out 27 March on Thirty Tigers

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ALL MY LOVING

Session musician, social-media phenom and jazz-guitar virtuoso Joel Paterson discusses his new instrumental Beatles album, his veneration of little-known studio pioneers and why he isn't your average gearhead

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Self-described "mid-century music re-enactor" Joel Paterson has a refreshingly retro attitude towards being a guitarist. "I'm so sorry, I had my phone off," he says, answering our call some two hours after our agreed interview time. "I've been practising all day for a gig tonight. You know, as guitarists, we have to get out of our rooms. There are too many guitar videos where we're all sitting at home. What's going on here?!"

What's going on is that the Chicago native has just released *Let It Be Guitar*, an album of Beatles classics through which he explores the Fab Four's music via the Kodachrome and slapback echo textures of the guitarists who influenced his playing.

"I'm kind of a music nerd and I've gone through a lot of stages," says Paterson. "Having started with country blues, I have since gone through phases of western swing, jazz, etc, so by the time I made this record I wanted to take all my favourite influences and use the songs of The Beatles to explore different styles. The Beatles were doing exactly the same thing."

The record also provided an opportunity for Paterson to pay tribute to some of his favourite session players. "I have a deep love for the unsung heroes of the recording studio, those crack guitar players who are responsible for so many hit records," he says. "Guys like Ernest Ranglin, who was the Studio One [Jamaica's answer to Motown] guitarist, for example. Nobody knows his name but he was on all those amazing early ska and reggae records. He did a cover of *You Won't See Me* from *Rubber Soul* and it's the best Beatles cover I have ever heard.

"I played it to my trio when we went into the studio to record the basic tracks for *No Reply* and they loved it. I said: 'I don't know how the hell to play like that!' but on the spur of the moment we started jamming around that groove and I tried to pay tribute to Ranglin's style, so it was more about feel than technique – very spontaneous. Alex Hall, our engineer, who also played drums on that recording, did a fantastic job getting the production to sound like that early Studio One sound. I'm very grateful. I don't know what that style is exactly – Jamaican ska with a Bigbsy.

"Those are the kinds of guitarists I like. Guys such as Hank Garland, too. He played the guitar lick on Elvis Presley's *Little Sister* but he's also one of the most burning jazz players ever. Those are the players that I gravitate to."

COUNTRY BOY

You probably don't think of country when you think of The Beatles, but Paterson is keen to emphasise the pull that US country and blues had on the band.

"If you listen to some of the early BBC sessions where they're playing live, The Beatles were one of the best rockabilly bands ever," says Paterson enthusiastically. "George Harrison did a lot of little tributes to Chet Atkins, too – you can tell he was a Chet fan. And The Beatles incorporated lots of country, blues and soul.

"Listen to their recording of *I Don't Want To Spoil The Party*. They'd obviously got hold of a Buck Owens record and had a Buck Owens phase. The same is true on *Act Naturally*. That was their take on US country so I took the idea and went further with it, making it even more like 1960s Nashville country music than they did. Stylistically speaking, it doesn't sound

quite like The Beatles except for the melodies and harmonies, which I was particularly picky about."

Inevitably for an artist who leans so heavily on mid-20th century textures, the conversation turns to the genius of Les Paul. "Any time you hear little overdubbed harmony parts, that's influenced by Les Paul," says Paterson. "*Honey Pie* in particular was an attempt to do one of his 'guitar orchestra' recordings, where you have a guitar mimicking all the parts of a big band. You have a little trumpet section, which is the guitars played up high, and then your sax section, which is more the mids.

"STYLISTICALLY, IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE THE BEATLES EXCEPT FOR THE MELODIES AND HARMONIES, WHICH I WAS PARTICULARLY PICKY ABOUT"

"Usually these are clusters of four-part harmonies that you overdub. With *Honey Pie*, I sat down for a week and forced myself to come up with the harmonies. That song means a lot to me, as it's George Martin's tour de force, arranging a 1920s-style big band, but everything you hear on my recording, aside from the bass, comes from a guitar.

"Nothing on this record featured speeding up the guitar. I dabbled with that technique on my album *Handful of Strings* and it's kind of a misconception that everything is sped up on a Les Paul record. That's really not the case. A lot of what you're hearing is him playing individual notes in four-part harmonies up the neck. That's one good thing about a Les Paul guitar, you can really reach those notes. Once you start getting into this style and listening to people who did these overdubbed records, you can get a feel for what is sped up and what isn't – and there's not as much as you might think. When it's sped up, it's obvious and very cartoonish sounding."

THE GUITAR'S THE STAR

Paterson is known for his beautiful vintage equipment, so it's no surprise that we take a detour when the conversation turns to the instrument itself. But the roots player has stern words for the guitar world.

"I'm happy to talk about the guitars I use as long as it's in the context of the music they make, what they sound like and why, because that's what guitars are to me," he says. "You can see what I recorded with. It's right there on the album cover and I chose those guitars for a simple reason: they're mine.

"The style of music I've been into over the years lends itself to vintage archtop guitars and that's always been my thing, so I was always looking for deals on archtops and I've been wheeling and dealing like that for years. I didn't set out to solely play vintage guitars but they were the instruments that sounded better, looked better, lasted longer and played better. There's no doubt about that as far as I'm concerned.

"If you want to ask me about the vintage guitar market, that's an unfortunate tangent. I don't want to come off as negative but there's a lot of greed and disinformation going on in the guitar world.

"There's a huge thing going on with people treating guitars almost like they would safari trophies, just hanging them on the wall, and that disgusts me. It's taking nice instruments out of the hands of people,

“I DIDN’T SET OUT TO SOLELY PLAY VINTAGE GUITARS BUT THEY WERE THE INSTRUMENTS THAT SOUNDED BETTER, LOOKED BETTER, LASTED LONGER AND PLAYED BETTER. THERE’S NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT”

especially good young guitar players, who could really benefit from them. Back in the day, there were always certain models that were out of reach because they were what the rockstars played – Bursts, 1950s Strats and dot neck 335s from 1959, that sort of thing – and that’s fine. But that’s rockstars. Not so long ago, you could still swing a deal on a beat-up 175 to get you going. Now it’s impossible to do anything. There are a lot of people just sitting on guitars that go unsold for years. What’s going on?!

“20 years ago, I would play a gig and someone would come up to me and say: ‘Oh, man, that’s a cool guitar, it sounds great.’ Now it’s: ‘Hey, that’s a cool guitar, what year is it?’, as if they’re working out the value in their heads – and usually they’re way off. I’m sure outside the US it’s even harder in some cases to find good American guitars. It’s always been that way.”

SEMI-SEDUCTION

With a range of vintage guitars at his disposal, Paterson employs what is one of the world’s sexiest hollowbodies as his main instrument. “I have a little stable of guitars that I go to when I record and gig, and everybody knows that the 1956 ES-295 is my main instrument,” he says. “It’s the one I travel with. I’ve played thousands of gigs with that guitar. It’s been with me forever. It’s all over anything I record.

“I’ve kept it pretty much original but it’s had a few modifications over the years. I added a Bigsby to it and had it refretted just to deck it out and make it do what everything that I want it to do. You can play jazz, rockabilly and rock ’n’ roll on it, and I have it set up so you can bend the strings and play blues. That’s the guitar I reach for first.

“When it comes to strings, people might expect me to use flatwounds, and I do have a couple of guitars set up like that at home, but the majority of the time I don’t use them. I like them but I don’t. They sound cool but I find them limiting and they can be a bit weird with a Bigsby, too. And when I sit around the house and play my archtops acoustically, they always sound so dead with flatwounds. It kind of bums me out. However, I love a low twangy guitar sound recorded with flatwounds – that’s the best.”

Like many artists, Paterson has a tried-and-tested formula for finding his live and studio sounds. “My set-ups on stage and in the studio are completely different,” he says. “When I use an amp in the studio, it’s usually a small Gibson amp such as a GA-6 or a GA-20, or a Fender Princeton Reverb. When I play live, it’s usually a tweed Fender Pro or, at smaller gigs, the Princeton, sometimes a Vibrolux.

“When I record direct in the studio I go through an Echoplex and into a 1963 Fender reverb tank and eventually into Pro Tools, which I’m basically using as a tape recorder – I don’t use any plugins or effects or anything like that; I want my sound to be as pure as possible. One of the many joys of going direct is that you can sit at home and work on harmonies in the middle of the night, which would not be practical in the studio. It’s not just for clean sounds either. You couldn’t get that distorted sound on *Revolution* without going direct, so there’s a precedent.

“All of the guitar sounds I love were recorded on small amps set on about one-and-a-half. When you look at pictures of people in Nashville, they’d have a little Gibson amp right above their heads. The physics of that, that when they were playing next to an upright-bass player and a piano player they couldn’t have turned up loud at all – that’s the sound right there, the different tones come more from the swapping of guitars than the amp settings. And you know, we’re not at Abbey Road here, we’re in a couple of tiny homemade studios in Chicago.”

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FAB FANS

The music of The Beatles carries a lot of sentimental weight for Joel and he's translated it into an emotive album replete with gorgeous reworkings of iconic songs. As for its standout moments, Paterson says: "*Because* is the one I worked the most on, as it has some of the most intense harmonies ever. It's the most awesome three-part harmony but it plays tricks on you. The Beatles triple-tracked that one on each voice and hard-panned it, so it's really dense. I tried to overdub those harmonies one note at a time but it came out sounding like Queen. So I worked out how to play it on one guitar. In this case, everything on there is my Jazzmaster. When I play live, Jazzmasters sometimes sound a bit thin to me, but on record they fit perfectly – not too much bass but not as thin as a Telecaster, so I like that a lot.

"*Girl* was recorded during the same session as *Michelle* and there's a bunch of weird overdubs on it. The Beatles' original has this 'sigh' in it by John Lennon. It's basically the entire hook of the song. I was trying to work out how to do that on guitar somehow. Eventually I managed to do it with feedback on my Echoplex. Basically, you crank the Echoplex until it starts feeding back and then you turn it down real quick. It's hard to make it sound smooth before it gets too sci-fi but I got it. There's nothing digital here, just my guitar, the Echoplex and a Fender reverb tank.

"*Things We Said Today* was recorded direct using an early 1950s ES-350 in my home studio, with an Echoplex and a reverb tank. I wanted to sound like Jørgen Ingmann, who was kind of the Danish Les Paul. He did a version of *Apache* in 1960, playing an L-7 with P-90s straight into the desk. I was trying to pay tribute to him so I used my 350 with P-90s. The song is in A minor, just like *Apache*, so I had fun with it.

"*This Boy* was played on a pedal steel guitar. It's an Emmons, as in Buddy Emmons, probably the world's greatest pedal steel player. I recorded it because I wanted to do that amazing three-part harmony and I was trying to learn it on lap steel but some of the bends and chords worked better on pedal steel because I could really bend into them with the foot pedals. I love that harmony, and I learnt it note for note. The sound of this arrangement was inspired by *Sleepwalk* [Santo & Johnny's ethereal instrumental classic], although that's not actually a pedal steel. I just wanted that vibe, a '59/60 Nashville sound.

"*Her Majesty* is 26 seconds of my Gibson J-50 and you'd be amazed at how many people don't know that original recording and have come up to me saying that their CD is defective. Americans don't always know as much about The Beatles as you might think."

The universal appeal of the Fab Four has inspired countless musicians. "I've been listening to The Beatles my whole life," says Paterson. "When I started playing guitar, I was so fixated on learning to play lead guitar and blues that it never dawned on me to play their music. But I've noticed that every time you come back to The Beatles, you start a new relationship with them. It's like you rediscover their music about a million times over the course of your life."

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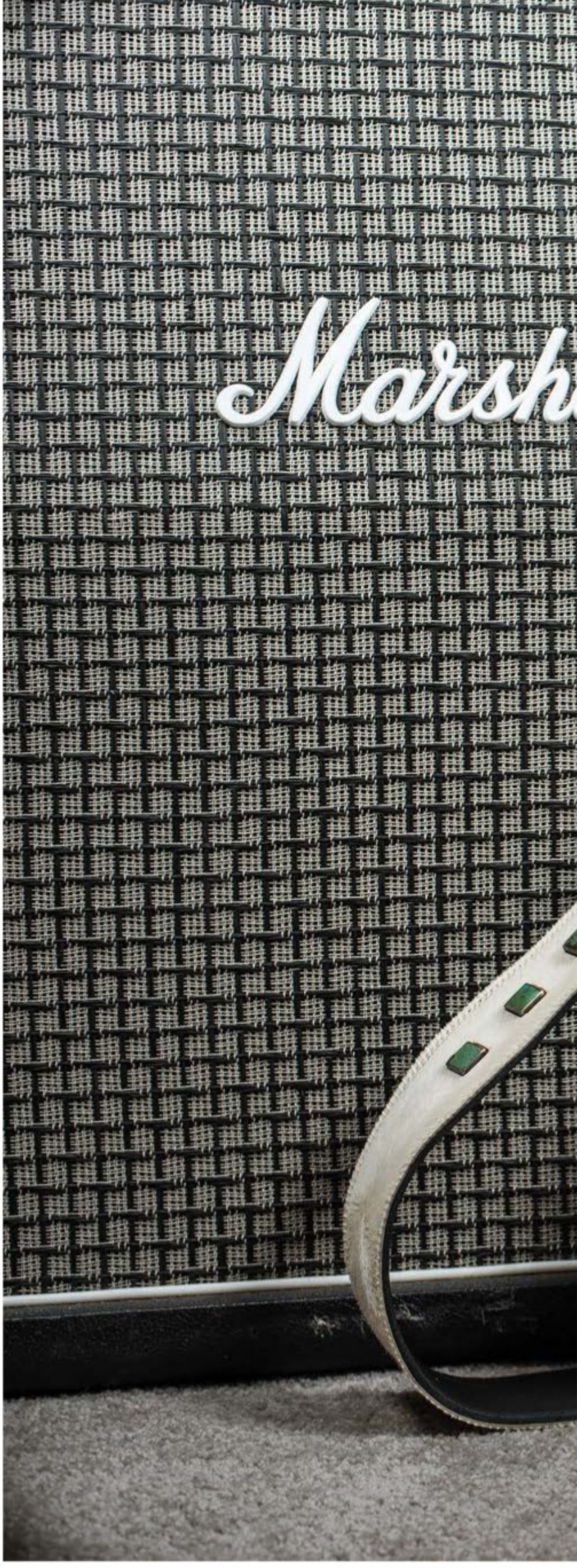
TYLER BRYANT

With his band The Shakedown, Tyler Bryant has released three studio albums and toured with rock giants AC/DC, Aerosmith and Guns N' Roses. We head to Nashville to check out the six-string machines that power his blues-infused brand of rock 'n' roll...

WORDS
CHRIS VINNICOMBE

PHOTOGRAPHY
ELEANOR JANE



ABOVE Tyler Bryant at home in Nashville with his beloved Fender Custom Shop Strat, 'Pinky 1'

RIGHT When Pinky 1 was stolen, Tyler's parents took out a loan to buy its replacement, Pinky 2

Tyler Bryant is a force of nature. We've been lucky enough to see him play live twice recently – once with his band The Shakedown and once trading blistering licks with fellow Southern wunderkind Daniel Donato at Fender's JammJam event at Winter NAMM 2020. One thing's for sure: whether jamming in the round at an industry event, tearing up concert stages with his favourite Shell Pink Strats or even just rocking out on Instagram… Tyler Bryant goes all-in.

Originally hailing from Honey Grove, Texas – 90 miles northeast of Dallas with a population of less than 2,000, the city bills itself as the 'sweetest town' in the Lone Star State – these days Bryant resides in Nashville with his wife, Rebecca Lovell, singer/guitarist in roots-rock duo Larkin Poe. Their home is situated in a leafy suburb south of Music City, and as you might expect, there are a *lot* of guitars inside.

In 2019, both Tyler and Rebecca's touring guitars went missing in separate incidents on British Airways flights from Nashville to Heathrow. Happily, the instruments were eventually located and Tyler's gear is all present and correct at the time of our visit. It's immediately obvious that Stratocasters are a prevailing theme, but it wasn't always that way…

SWITCH CRAFT

"My first guitar was an Epiphone Les Paul," he remembers. "I never liked Strats at the beginning. I remember going to Guitar Center, picking up a Strat and playing the few things I knew, and hitting the toggle switch. I was like, 'That's a bad design! The switch is right where you're playing!'

"I LOVE STRATS WITH HUMBUCKERS IN THE BRIDGE POSITION. I CAN GET ANY TONE I WANT OUT OF THAT CONFIGURATION"

"Then I saw videos of Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan… but most importantly, there's a guitarist named Alan Haynes in Texas, and when I saw him, I realised he was using the switch to create an effect. He was doing like a wah effect, he was using it to accentuate certain notes where he would be on the neck pickup and flick down to the bridge and it would all of a sudden brighten up. So that was a huge selling point for me, and one of the reasons to play a Strat."

Over time, making the most of that pickup switch has become second nature. "If you ever see videos of me playing, I probably change pickups 60 times a song or more," he admits. "It's just something I've worked into what I do and now I just love the Strat. The feel of it, the contours, everything about it is exactly what I'm after.

"I love Strats with humbuckers in the bridge position. I can get any tone I want out of that configuration. The other guitarist in The Shakedown, Graham [Whitford, son of Aerosmith's Brad – Ed]

mainly plays Les Pauls, so he's got this big humbucker sound, and with the single-coils and the humbucker I can kind of find where I fit in, in the mix of things."

DIFFERENT BALLGAME

Remarkably, Bryant was gifted a Sunburst 1960 Stratocaster by an NBA Hall of Famer when he was just 13: "It was a gift from Don Nelson, who at the time was the coach of the Dallas Mavericks basketball team. I was playing at this club called Gilley's in Dallas and it was a honky-tonk crowd – I believe Dwight Yoakam was playing outside, so they had a bunch of cowboys wanting to line-dance on the inside.

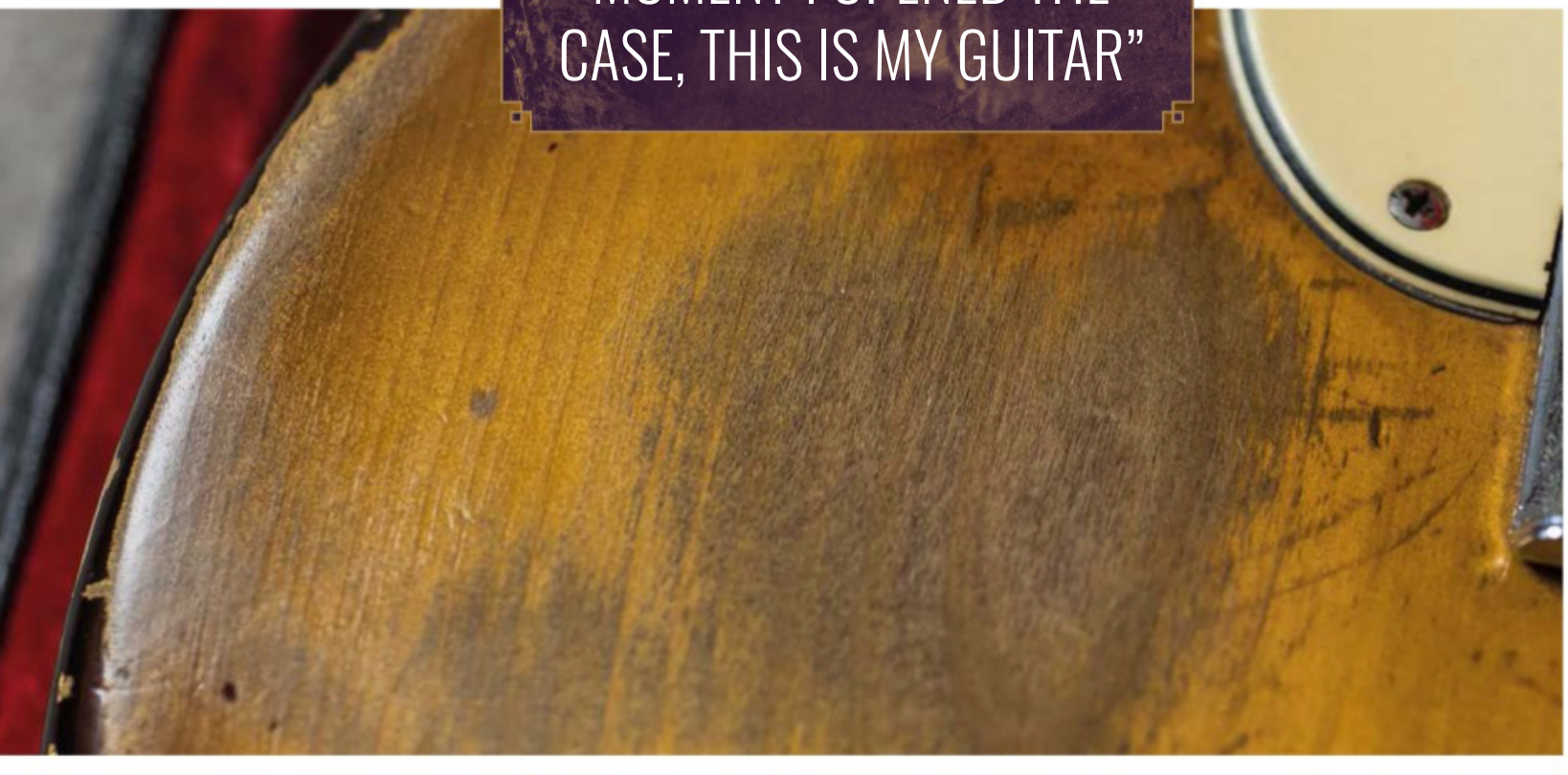
"I was playing just slow blues after slow blues with my blues band and no-one was paying attention, except for this really huge guy in the front. So I went and stood on the table he was sitting at and soloed for like 15 minutes. Afterwards he asked me what my dream guitar was, and because Alan Haynes played a 1960 Strat through a Vibro-King, I said a 1960 Strat.

"He said, 'Why don't you have one?' And I said, 'They're crazy expensive.' A couple of days later one showed up at my house! It's still one of my most prized possessions."

Was there any danger that a 13-year-old wouldn't appreciate the nuances of such an instrument? "Nah, I knew from the moment I opened the case, this is my guitar. And I'd spent so much time, pretty much from 11 to 13, just studying blues and guitars. I basically would get all of the guitar magazines and all the buyer's guides – I nerded out a lot more at that age than I do now! So I knew exactly what it was.

"I really did appreciate it for what it was, but I always just treated it like any other guitar. I didn't use kid gloves with it. We played at this club called Dylan's in Paris, Texas, that was attached to

"I KNEW FROM THE MOMENT I OPENED THE CASE, THIS IS MY GUITAR"



THIS SPREAD Tyler's prized 1960 Fender Stratocaster was a gift from NBA Hall of Famer Don Nelson

a Denny's. I was playing with my band The Blues Buddies and I set the guitar on top of my amp when we took a break – we'd play four-hour sets and take two breaks, or something – and someone put a beer right on it! And you can see a little circular ring on it! At that moment I realised a lot of people don't know how special this is!"

PINK & PERKY

Tyler turned to the Fender Custom Shop to create something he'd be a little less worried about taking out on the road, and the first of his Shell Pink Relic Stratocasters – aka 'Pinky 1' – was born, complete with a neck profile inspired by the '60. "I took the '60 to the Custom Shop and the original pink Strat I have is modelled to a tee after that one," he explains.

Pinky 1 soon became Bryant's "favourite guitar in the world" and it was even adorned with handwritten lyrics by Steven Tyler and the signature of the aforementioned Alan Haynes. Yet even this instrument wouldn't prove impervious to the dangers of touring – it was stolen from The Shakedown's van in early 2013 along with three other guitars, a bass and a snare drum while the band slept at a hotel in Spokane Valley, Washington.

Happily, Tyler was reunited with his original pink Strat when it was recovered just over five years later, but in the meantime, he acquired a replacement in the form of 'Pinky 2'. "Pinky 2 is actually the one I play the most now," he reveals. "When the original one was stolen, my mother and father took out a little loan and

OPPOSITE Pinky 1 retains the classic Strat pickup configuration. “I can’t bring myself to put a humbucker in the original one,” says Tyler, “it sounds so good”

THIS PAGE Pinky 2 features a ShawBucker bridge humbucker fitted by Fender’s in-house pickup guru Tim Shaw

bought the second one for me. And when I put that custom pickguard on it, I found that they’d etched their names on the inside, along with my sister’s name and the guy who’d loaned ’em the money!

“Because my original guitar was missing for five years, I did all those tours – AC/DC, Guns N’ Roses – with Pinky 2. When the original one came back it was like, but I love you *both*! And in that period of time the humbucker kind of became more my thing [Pinky 2 features a ShawBucker in the bridge installed by Tim Shaw himself – Ed]. But I can’t bring myself to put a humbucker in the original one, it sounds so good. Abigail Ybarra did the pickups on the original one.”

Pinky 2’s distinctive scratchplate was made by a friend, but originally intended for Shakedown bandmate Graham: “He made it for Graham but he had my address so he sent it to my house. I felt the package and was like, ‘That’s a Strat ’guard!’ Graham had a Strat but at the time he was mainly playing Les Pauls. So I went ahead and opened the package and decided I was gonna put it on my guitar and tell Graham about it later!

“I probably just admitted to a felony,” he laughs. “Isn’t it a felony to open someone else’s mail? But anyway as soon as he saw Pinky 2 with that ’guard he was like, ‘That is so sick! It’s perfect for your guitar!’”

A third Custom Shop Stratocaster also sees a lot of live action with The Shakedown, but this time there’s a serious hot-rod vibe. ‘The Judge’ got its name because it came to Tyler while he was taking part in jury service, and is a 2016 limited edition HS model with an EVH bridge humbucker and a Twisted Tele neck pickup. First encountering the model at the NAMM show, he remembers “flipping out over it” before contacting Fender “probably an annoying number of times” while attempting to get his hands on one. “They were already all sold or spoken for,” he remembers, “but I convinced them to make me one.

NEW FLAVOURS

Aside from the quartet of Strats we've encountered thus far, one of the most striking guitars in Tyler's collection is a gold/tortoiseshell Flying V made by Matt Hughes of Banker Custom Guitars – a member of Gibson's recently announced Authorized Partnership Program, which allows a small number of boutique builders to build Gibson-approved instruments using the brand's trademarked body shapes.

"I'm a huge Albert King fan," Tyler explains. "One of my favourite records is *Live Wire/Blues Power* and I always wanted to get a Flying V at some point. I wear the Fender flag very proudly – everyone who comes to a Shakedown show, especially when we go to Europe, a lot of times they're chanting 'Pinky' more than they are for us! – and I can always depend on the Strats, but every now and then it's always nice to kind of flirt with a different idea.

"I just got this guitar a couple of days ago, actually! But I can guarantee it's gonna see some stage time. I wrote my first song with it yesterday. I'm gonna cherish this guitar because it was hand-made by a friend of mine and it sounds unbelievable. It's the best Flying V I think I've ever played."

Other deviations from the Fender path include a 335-sized, aluminium-bodied custom electric made by Meloduende in France. This remarkable, flamey beast is known as 'The Big Fish'. "I'd seen the one that Scott [Holiday] had, but I never knew who made it," Tyler explains. "Bertrand from Meloduende reached out to me through Instagram and said 'Hey, I'd love for you to try a guitar,' and he sent me this and it just sounds unbelievable."

Oversized custom control knobs are a feature of Meloduende instruments. "I wanna get some of these knobs for other guitars," he enthuses, "they are so sick! If the light hits it right, you can see that it has gold paint on the neck, it's very cool. Yeah this thing sounds unreal. It's got these really crazy harmonic overtones.

"I was hesitant to pull the trigger because I'm such a Strat guy, but it's cool to have different colours in the colouring box, you know, different tools. Especially when you are going into the studio. That's kind of how I got into D'Angelico stuff, too. It's the same thing with the old Nationals and stuff… I just love guitars!"

SLIDING DOORS

"That's my main resonator," says Tyler, pointing at the metallic red National Duolian which, even among this stellar collection, is difficult to take your eyes away from. And when a killer slide player like Tyler is playing it, it's impossible to ignore.

"That's another story of me kind of stepping on Graham's toes! Graham found this guitar on Craigslist. He texted me and said, 'I think I wanna go buy it', and I went and bought it before he could!

SCHOOL'S IN SESSION

TYLER DESCRIBES OPENING FOR SOME OF THE BIGGEST ROCK BANDS OF ALL TIME ON THE WORLD'S BIGGEST STAGES AS "LIKE GOING TO COLLEGE". WE ASKED HIM ABOUT THE KEY LESSONS LEARNED...

"There were some really basic things. The first three AC/DC shows we did, I did on a 20-foot cable. I remember having all of this adrenaline and all this energy and running out on stage, taking off to run to try to get to the people on the left side of the arena to entertain them, and dragging my pedalboard across the stage behind me! My first realisation was: I need a wireless system!

"But I think the biggest takeaway – especially with AC/DC – was just the simplicity in the songwriting. Not trying to over-complicate things. We learned so much about playing in big rooms. Even down to drum dynamics. The stuff that translates in small clubs doesn't translate in big stadiums. It's finding what makes people wanna hold their beer up in the air and shout… and leaning on that."

OPPOSITE 'The Judge' is a limited-edition Fender Custom Shop model with an EVH bridge humbucker and Twisted Tele neck pickup

ABOVE LEFT Tyler's Banker Custom Flying V is a recent addition to the collection

LEFT This striking Meloduende model is replete with "crazy harmonic overtones"

THIS SPREAD Tyler is a mean slide guitar player and his go-to instruments for bottleneck are both vintage National models

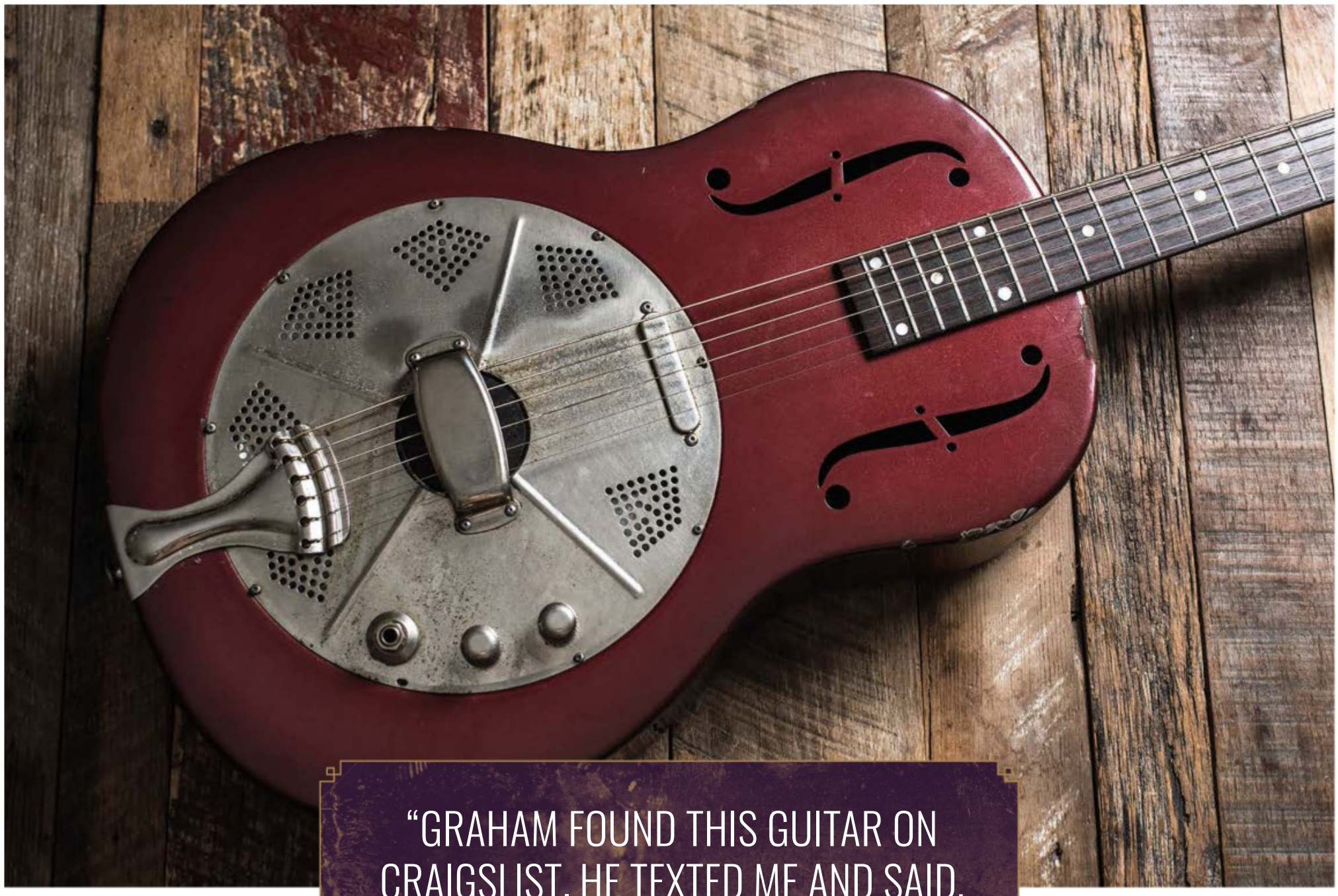
It's a 1931 Duolian that was originally owned by [Nashville session luminary] Tom Bukovac. It'd had a neck replacement and it had been Plek'd and someone had painted it with car finish!"

The mods don't end there. "I got the Hot-Plate from National, it has a Lollar Tele neck pickup in it. I've had so many resonators where I've cut into them to put pickups in – this is so functional and it sounds amazing. I don't have to stuff the resonator with foam and I can play it with a 100-watt Marshall. I mean, it feeds back but in the cool, Chris Whitley *Terra Incognita* kind of way. It's a really beautiful one. It's the right amount of warm and bright for me. Some of 'em are really bassy, some of 'em are just only tinny… for example this guy!"

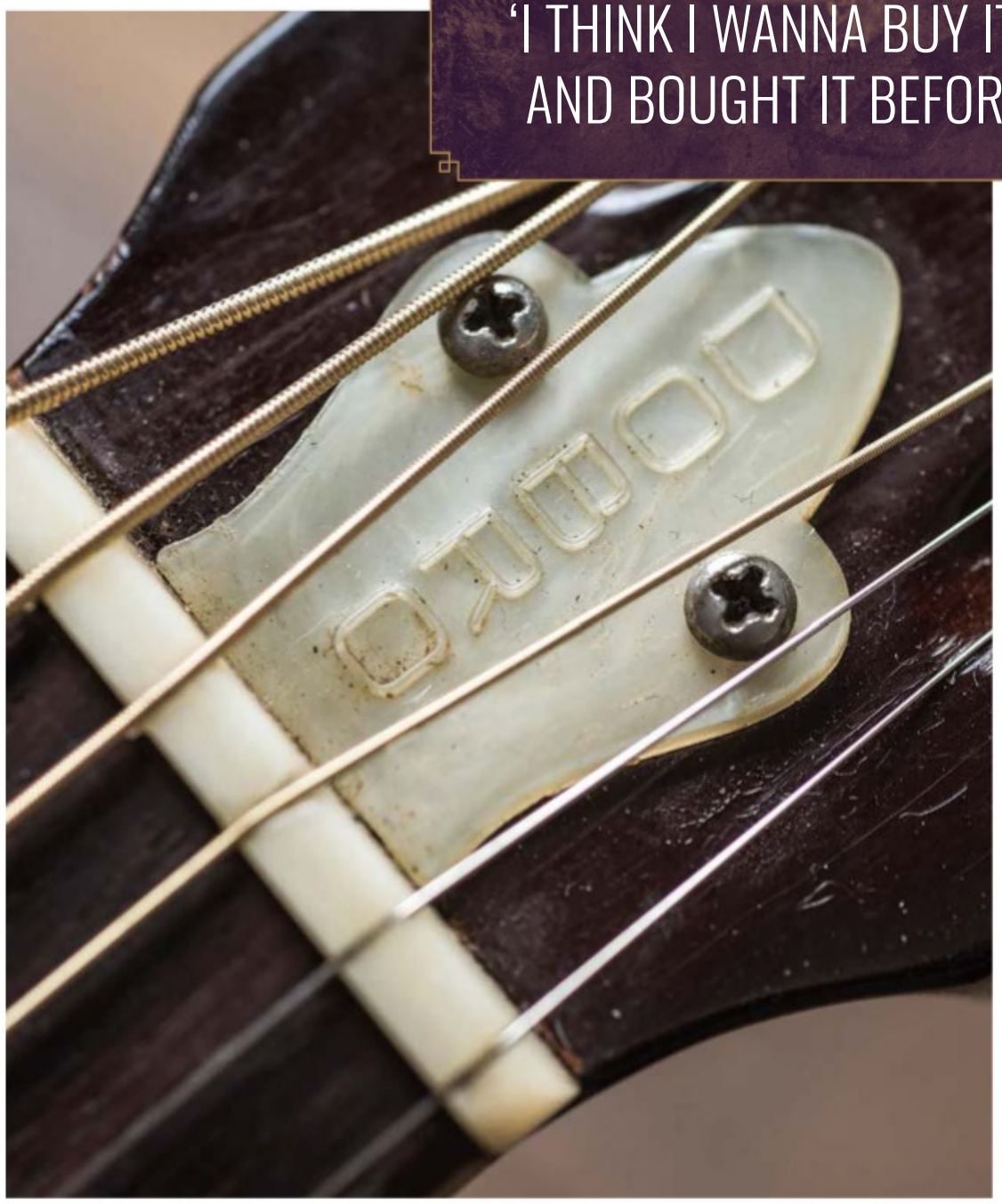
Tyler pulls out the other red National guitar in his life. "I actually bought this the same day that the original Pinky came back. This is a 1954 Reso-Phonic student model."

The guitar's wonderfully plunky, lo-fi tone sounds like it's emanating from an ancient record player. "It sounds like a banjo," Tyler asserts, "but it has that cool Johnny Winter-type bite to it. This one's never made it onto a record but I always try. I wrote a lot of the songs for the new Shakedown record on it [2019's *Truth And Lies*]. When I woke up this morning it was the first thing I reached for. I keep this one by my bed.

"I was going to try to put a pickup in it, and then I thought, there's something so magic about it just being an acoustic instrument that you just carry around and write songs on. The hardest part with



"GRAHAM FOUND THIS GUITAR ON CRAIGSLIST. HE TEXTED ME AND SAID, 'I THINK I WANNA BUY IT', AND I WENT AND BOUGHT IT BEFORE HE COULD!"



ABOVE Tyler's Custom Shop Telecaster was a Christmas gift from his wife, Larkin Poe singer/guitarist Rebecca Lovell

this guitar is that everything's metal, so everything vibrates – I had to track down all the right screws, and then get 'em all in there really solid. So there's a lot of glue in there making sure it doesn't vibrate."

STRIKING GOLD

The conversation circles back around to Fender as Tyler produces a fine-looking Shoreline Gold Telecaster that was a Christmas present from his other half. "Rebecca got me this guitar for Christmas, it's a Custom Shop 1959 Tele, which we call 'Mary Dow' – it was my grandmother's name. It's basically modelled after a stock '59 Tele, with the rosewood neck, but the neck feels eerily similar to my Strat. I love this guitar and I love the colour.

"It was like a floor model for Fender that was sent around to a lot of the different Fender showrooms, and I went into the one in Nashville, played it and loved it. And I'd ordered a Custom Shop Tele, 'cause I kind of got the Tele bug in 2018.

"Rebecca reached out to Fender and said, 'Could you guys rush Tyler's Custom Shop Tele for Christmas?' They said, 'No, but we have one we think he would like.' And that's where this one came from! It's a brilliant sounding guitar. It's been on the road and it's been on the record."

Although Pinky 1, Pinky 2, The Judge and the '31 National Duolian are Tyler's ever-present touring companions, he's starting to add more and more arrows to his quiver for live shows and jokes that he'll soon need a semi-trailer truck to transport all the guitars. Whichever instrument Tyler Bryant picks up, you can guarantee he'll be playing the hell out of it.

Follow @thetylerbryant on Instagram or visit tylerbryantandtheshakedown.com for more

STOMPING GROUND

TYLER'S SIGNATURE OVERDRIVE PEDAL – THE RODENBERG TB DRIVE SHAKEDOWN SPECIAL – RECENTLY SCOOPED A RAVE 9/10 REVIEW IN THESE VERY PAGES AND FEATURES TWO STACKABLE OVERDRIVES...

"There's a little bit more of a glassy sound than a Tube Screamer," he says, "but it's definitely Tube Screamer-ish. Think about the best-sounding Tube Screamers you've ever played! I used to have two Tube Screamers on my board because I didn't really know what else to do. This is my desert island pedal now."

Does he see himself collaborating on other signature pedals in the future? "I would love to do a fuzz and I would love to do an octave fuzz. There's a lot of low-octave fuzz on our records. There's a couple of pedals that I use to get that and then there's also a couple of plugins, which I'm not gonna tell you about because I want to make a pedal that sounds like those plugins!"

ABUSE AND MISUSE

WORDS TONY BACON

From slicing speaker cones with razorblades to backwards tape effects and turning guitars into splinters in a collision of angst and art, rule-breaking was central to many of the great leaps forward in pop history. Here we celebrate the trailblazing guitarists who coloured outside of the lines

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Smash hits: Pete Townshend swings his Strat during a performance with The Who at Granby Halls, Leicester

There are musicians who look after their instruments and gear with great care, nervous of even the slightest ding or blemish. And then there are those who are willing to chop and change and knock their stuff about just to see what happens. It's the latter that we're interested in here, the musicians whose use, misuse and abuse of their gear helped change the course of popular music.

POOR SOUND? NO, INSPIRED SOUND

By the late 1960s, Keith Richards was regularly using a portable Philips cassette recorder to capture song ideas while he was out and about in dressing rooms, hotels and anywhere else inspiration might strike. He began to savour the sound that this relatively crude tool lent to his demos, especially those made with the acoustic he strummed in order to remember chord sequences, melodies and ideas that might otherwise go missing.

As the recording sessions began for the Rolling Stones' next album, which would become 1968's *Beggars Banquet*, Richards suggested to producer Jimmy Miller that the band might transfer one of his rough Philips demos to the recorder at London's Olympic Studios. The crunchy, jangly tones of his acoustics went on to form the remarkable backbone of *Street Fighting Man*, one of the album's standouts and a live staple to this day. It's a firm reminder that sound quality is far from an objective notion.

IGNORE THE NAME ON THE BOX

In 1951, Fender introduced a new amp capable of pumping 26 watts out of a single 15-inch speaker. When electric-blues player Willie Kizart got his, he peered at the plate on the front that said "Bassman" – and chose to ignore it. When he plugged in, Kizart quickly realised that, though it may have been built for bass, this was clearly a great guitar amp.

Street recording man: Keith Richards with Mick Jagger at Olympic Studios, 1968

Later, Kizart was in something of a panic. He'd just arrived from Mississippi at Sam Phillips' Memphis studio but, en route, the amp had somehow fallen from his car's roof rack. He took it inside, plugged it in and found that something wasn't right. The sound was fuzzy. Someone suggested one of the tubes might have blown, and apparently the band stuffed the amp with newspaper to try and keep the dislodged speaker cone in place. There was no time to repair it properly.

Kizart and Ike Turner's band, known for now as Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats, cut five tracks that day, including proto-rock 'n' roll A-side *Rocket "88"*. Kizart's fuzzed-out riffs powered it along with a sound that marked the debut of deliberate distortion – and all because of some accidental abuse to a new Fender amp.

AGAIN – ONLY BACKWARDS?

Today there are plugins that can do it, but creating backwards guitar was a technique that first began to turn up in the 60s. Nobody did it quite so well as Jimi Hendrix for the solo on the title track of the *Are You Experienced* album, although George Harrison had beaten him to it with the brilliantly conceived solo on *I'm Only Sleeping*, recorded in early 1966.

© CAndrew Maclear/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

JIMI WAS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR NEW SOUNDS, TEXTURES AND EFFECTS. BUT WHEN HE DECIDED HE WANTED TO HAVE A BACKWARDS GUITAR SOLO, IT MUST HAVE CAUSED A FEW SCRATCHED HEADS AT OLYMPIC STUDIOS

Jimi was, of course, always looking for new sounds and textures and effects. But in 1967, when he decided he wanted to have a backwards-playing guitar for this solo, it must have caused a few scratched heads at Olympic Studios. It took a concerted effort to work out what you wanted to hear in reverse and then record it 'forwards' against a flipped multitrack running backwards.

Jimi worked out his part carefully, paying attention to the way the shape of the notes change when they're reversed. Then he had a go at recording the part against the backwards-running tape – which would then be played back in the regular direction. The guitar part Jimi added would now sound 'backwards' against the regular track. Got that? It's difficult enough to get a sober head around the concept, let alone one that might have indulged in any chemical alterations.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SMASH IT UP

Looking back on the smashing 1960s, Pete Townshend once said that he sometimes felt bad about having wrecked particularly good guitars, excusing himself by explaining that, often, the unfortunate six-strings that he destroyed were "production-line instruments".

There are many photographs of him taking it out his aggression on Strats. But one of the most famous is the snap of him sitting sulkily at home against a backdrop of dismembered Rickenbackers.

Apparently it all began in summer 1964, when The Who played one of their regular gigs at the Railway Hotel pub in west London. It was here that Townshend first smashed his guitar into the ceiling above the stage – possibly by accident, possibly by design. Either way, sensing a positive reaction from his audience, he and the group continued to develop their performative deconstruction routines.

Backwards compatibility: Jimi Hendrix in search of innovation, 1968

© BIPS/Getty Images

SMASHING EQUIPMENT MIGHT SEEM LIKE A SENSELESS ACT TO MOST OF US, BUT DIDN'T DO THE WHO'S CAREER ANY HARM AT ALL

ABOVE Off the mark: The Creation performing their hit *Making Time*, 1966

OPPOSITE Good feedback: Paul McCartney and John Lennon at Granville Studio

It certainly didn't hurt when Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp came to see the group there with a film appearance in mind. But once they saw what was going on, they decided to manage them instead. Smashing a guitar might seem the ultimate act of guitar abuse and a senseless act of destruction to most of us, but it didn't do The Who's career any harm at all.

ACCEPT THE UNACCEPTABLE

Fred Frith was the guitarist in rambunctious English art-rock outfit Henry Cow. The nimble-fingered trailblazer played a sunburst ES-345, with the Varitone dismissed, and with a removable pickup mounted at the nut-end of the neck.

For his debut solo album *Guitar Solos*, released in 1974, Frith went even further out. He developed the unconventional idea of the 'prepared guitar' based on avant-garde composer John Cage's 'prepared piano', which saw him wedge objects such as cutlery and screws between the strings to alter their sound. Frith applied these ideas to his instrument using alligator clips, sticks, springs and pieces of metal and glass, to create an unusual array of sounds and tones.

Frith taught in the music department at Mills College in Oakland, California, until his retirement in 2018. He described it as the epicentre of US experimental music. If you're interested in exploiting household objects to create your own 'prepared guitar', check out the works of Glenn Branca and Derek Bailey. It's guitar, Fred, but not as we know it.

FIDDLE WITH YOUR KNOBS

In October '64 at EMI Studios on London's Abbey Road, strange noises were heard coming from Studio 2. The Beatles were recording their eighth single, *I Feel Fine*, and a visitor from *Beat Instrumental* magazine reported that the song began with "a very odd sound".

When he asked Paul McCartney for an explanation, he was told that the sound appeared at first as a mistake, when McCartney played a low A at the start of the song and heard feedback coming from John Lennon's unattended J-160E and amplifier.

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© Val Wilmer/Redferns/Getty Images

ABOVE Slash and burn: The Kinks performing on TV show *Ready Steady Go!*

OPPOSITE Stick it to the man: Jerry Garcia on stage at the Tivoli Concert Hall, Copenhagen, 1972

Producer George Martin later credited the idea to Lennon, who he said had been messing around with feedback. However the sound came about, it was certainly an early example of the intentional use of feedback in the studio – though it doesn't quite match the intensity and type that we associate with later records by The Who, Hendrix and others. "The Beatles love oddness and decided to leave it in," the *Beat* man concluded, summing up perfectly the group's admirable approach to exploration.

YOURS TO CUT OUT AND KEEP

Jerry Garcia's 'Alligator' Strat, which he used a lot in the 1970s, came up for auction in December 2019. The guitar was given to the Grateful Dead man by Graham Nash, and was heavily modified. Its moniker comes from the reptilian sticker on its pickguard, which depicts an alligator brandishing a knife and fork, and is flanked by another sticker for Harley-Davidson and another, presumably ironic, sticker that reads "Policeman Helper". Of course, Jerry was hardly the first to adorn his axe with stickers.

Woody Guthrie may not have been the first either, but he was one of the earliest to make a mark with a profoundly political sticker. With his dust-bowl ballads, Guthrie was the voice of the blue-collar US worker during the Great Depression of the 1930s, famously singing *This Land Is Your Land*. He adorned several of his guitars – mostly Gibson acoustics, including a J-45, an L-00, and an SJ – with a sticker that declared "This Machine Kills Fascists" – and he wasn't joking.

WORKS FOR THAT? MIGHT WORK FOR THIS

Eddie Phillips of The Mark Four was looking for a way to keep a drone note going on his low E string while he hammered on a solo with his left hand on the others. He tried sawing the string with a hacksaw, which seemed pretty good – until he realised he'd gouged some huge grooves in the bottom horn of his beloved ES-335. Then he had a brainwave.

Phillips ditched the saw, headed to his local music store and picked up a violin bow. After his drummer suggested that applying rosin to the bow might help things along, Phillips was really onto something. As a bonus, he could flip the stick over and use it as a makeshift bottleneck.

"I loved to do things on guitar that weren't normally done," Phillips later said. "People were happy to play guitar in the normal way, which is okay, but I was always trying to do something a little bit different.

It all added to our reputation as this off-the-wall band." The Mark Four morphed into The Creation, and while that band never quite earned the fame they deserved, it seems that Jimmy Page certainly noticed Phillips' continuing application of the bow to the electric guitar.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO RIP IT UP

Following a few twists in his romantic life, Dave Davies was all fired up when he found himself alone with a razor blade and his little green Elpico amp. The poor thing didn't stand a chance. Dave slashed at its speaker cone. Now the sound matched his mood: distorted and angry.

When he and his band The Kinks recorded *You Really Got Me* at IBC studios in London in July 1964, Davies' abused amp provided the perfect sound for the song. The intro says it all, and it's become a classic.

The guitarist later recalled that he would connect the "modified" Elpico to a Vox AC30 for added volume, and maybe that's how he used it for *You Really Got Me*. In subsequent years, that raw tone would become easier to attain, with pre-gain controlling the preamp and post-gain or master volume controlling the power amp, but Dave's idea was similar. His rasping tone prompted a *Disc Weekly* reviewer to single out the "gimmicky tribal noise" of *You Really Got Me* for praise. A tribe of razor-wielding Daves – now there's a scary thought.

HOW MANY STRINGS DO YOU USE?

Presumably fed up with continually having to tune his acoustic 12-string, David Bowie took to the stage during his Sound+Vision tour in 1990 with a black Flying V90 Double, complete with Floyd Rose vibrato and split-diamond fingerboard inlays. What was even more unusual about the guitar, however, is that it had only one string, reportedly the D.

Perhaps it was a callback to Bowie's early days, when he learned to play using a one-string ukulele (or so he claimed, surely with tongue in cheek). Maybe it was a reaction to the kind of thing that Adrian Belew, his guitar sparring partner on the tour, would play. It's possible that it simply suited the kind of relatively simple riffs he needed for the Spiders-era section of these retrospective shows. And maybe it's worth a revival. We all know what happened when Keith Richards dispensed with just one of the six strings he felt he didn't need any more…

Many of the examples we've looked at happened in the earlier days of guitar music, and there's a reason for that. Modern tech is certainy convenient, and there are so few limitations today on what we can achieve – but that can come at a cost to adaptability and rule-bending.

Perhaps there's something fundamental missing from this brave new world. It would be nice to think that we still have the choice to creatively abuse and misuse if we want to. Why not give it a try? **G**

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SHOW BUSINESS

1

NAMM isn't the only place to be for guitar fans in January. The Amigo SoCal Guitar Show in Costa Mesa is the perfect place to hunt for buried treasure…

WORDS MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

January is a big month for guitar enthusiasts across the globe thanks to the Winter NAMM show. Participants and onlookers salivate at each new model and reissue announced, and social media users hit refresh as often as their apps will allow, hoping to catch the latest news from their favourite brands and musicians. Regular attendees know just how loud the din of detuned guitars can be, and those who watch from home may actually be getting a better deal, with channels such as *Guitar.com* able to filter through the noise to find the best and most important new models and offers.

However, if new gear isn't your thing, perhaps the less frenetic Amigo Guitar Show in Costa Mesa would be more your speed. Based at the OC Fairgrounds, just 13 miles from the Anaheim Convention Center, this is the perfect place to scope out all manner of rare and unique vintage instruments, equipment and assorted memorabilia. Read on for some of our highlights.

DREW BERLIN

During our first lap around the show, we encountered famed dealer and 'Burst Brother' Drew Berlin, whose understated and unassuming booth belied the treasures lurking within. Behind a makeshift entryway of folding tables were rows of vintage 1950s Stratocasters resting in their original cases, their sunbursts showing off absolutely gorgeous figuring in their ash bodies. Berlin pointed out almost identical but well-hidden seam lines on two examples that the naked eye might ordinarily overlook.

The guitar that initially captured our attention was a 1962 model in Fiesta Red (1), a colour that's the subject of much admiration and speculation due to the sheer number of shades we see these days. Some non-faded examples exist but yellowed clear coats wreak havoc on the notion of what actually constitutes 'Fiesta', and even the most accurate restorations struggle to hold a candle to vintage examples. This original model, however, was breathtaking.

The Strat has a deep chocolate round-lam Brazilian rosewood fretboard and gently oxidised hardware. It's clear this one's been played thanks to a refret with much larger frets, and because the guitar has no undercoat, the finish is starting to flake off around the edges of the body. It also retains its original pickguard.

2

3

Drew then surprised us by pulling a gigbag from beneath one of his tables and asking, with a smirk: "Do you want to see something really impressive?" In the bag was an old brown case and, within that, a 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard (2). Its lemon-tea sunburst is one of the most beautiful we've ever seen, applied over a top that's neither plain nor obscenely flamed. It was light, acoustically resonant, and felt like a time capsule to a bygone era of guitar craft.

Drew informed us that this guitar has never been circulated, and its serial number has never been posted online. It's a little guitar secret, available only to those who are in the know – and that forbidden knowledge comes with a price tag of a mere $320,000 USD.

DAKOTA'S COOL GUITARS

On that same lap, we ran into our good friend Dakota Raysik, eponymous founder of Dakota's Cool Guitars. Dakota is a gainfully employed road tech for a number of acts you'd recognise if we had the space to list them here. It's these connections that give him access to pieces that simply wouldn't come up elsewhere.

Take this 1978 Les Paul Standard (3), which comes directly from Doyle Wolfgang von Frankenstein of Misfits fame. This guitar was used during the Danzig era and decorated by Doyle himself, with blacked-out binding, dripping painted blood on the fretboard, and a sticker of Lon Chaney's titular ghoul from Universal's 1925 horror *The Phantom Of The Opera*, peering from the headstock. As the story goes, Doyle traded this "piece of shit" for a tattoo in 1983. It's been hidden away ever since.

This wasn't Dakota's only piece that had passed through the hands of a notable player. He also had two exceptional items on display from Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong: two TV Yellow Gibson Juniors (4 & 5) from 1961, each with a different body shape.

1 Red hot: Drew Berlin's 1962 Fender Stratocaster in Fiesta Red

2 Secret weapon: Berlin's 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard is a stunning and rare example

3 Horror business: Dakota Raysik's 1978 Les Paul Standard, custom-painted by Misfits guitarist Doyle Wolfgang von Frankenstein

4&5

6

4 & 5 Having a blast: Dakota Raysik holds up two 1961 TV Yellow Gibson Juniors, used on tour by Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong

6 Unsung hero: Mike Reeder's blue-burst Rickenbacker-esque guitar was made by Paul Barth, a little-known but important figure in guitar history

Both were touring instruments, so a couple of small but reversible upgrades have been made, including aftermarket tuners on both and added knurling on the speed knobs of the LP DC. The guitars represent a transitional period for Gibson and sell as a set for $45,000. When pressed, Dakota agreed to throw in the MXR Dookie Drive pedal for any buyer willing to pay the asking price. You're very welcome.

MIKE'S MUSIC

Cincinnati dealer Mike Reeder rolled out the proverbial red carpet for us at his booth. His shop Mike's Music is renowned for the quality of its inventory, as well as for Reeder's reputation for detailed appraisals. He has worked for scores of famous musicians and has even consulted with Gibson on a number of its reissues. This is definitely the kind of guy you want in your corner if you're on the hunt for something truly special.

And special is precisely what he had in store for us. From a silver case he pulled a delightful Rickenbacker-esque guitar made by Paul Barth (6), a hero whose contributions to the development of the electric guitar in the early and mid 20th century have gone largely unsung.

Barth was instrumental in the creation of the Rickenbacker 'Frying Pan', regarded as the first electric guitar, in the early 1930s. He also worked for National and Magnatone on a number of projects, meaning you can find his indelible fingerprints on a sector of the early electric-guitar industry.

This blue-bursted beauty was made by the legend himself, with a double-bound body shape reminiscent of the Rickenbacker Capri model. It's somewhat of a cross between Magnatone and Rickenbacker elements, with a three-bolt neck joint, graceful cutaways, painted fretboard, and full-body white pickguard.

7

8

9

Another treat came in the form of a stunning 1948 Gibson J-200 (7) with an exceptionally flamed maple back and sides. It's a fantastic early example of one of the first maple-backed guitars in the line, and it came to Mike from its original owner in San Francisco. There was also a deliciously aged all-gold but gorgeously greened-out 1956 Gibson Les Paul (8), as well as a perfect mid-late 1961 Jazzmaster in Lake Placid Blue (9) with a wavy Brazilian fretboard and a patent-number vibrato. Keep up with Reeder's adventures via his *Fret Buzz* and *Guitar Pickers* web series at The Village on YouTube.

JAY ROSEN

Operating out of Emeryville, California, dealer Jay Rosen has an eye for kitsch and always seems to have the cream of the crop in stock. At Amigo, he showed off rows of slick Strats from the 1950s through to the 1990s, as well as an Elite 1980s model in Bahama Green.

Unsurprisingly, our attention was quickly drawn to a Lake Placid Blue Jaguar (10) at the table. Of the many custom-colour offsets at the show, this one had the most unusual story. Observing the guitar from headstock down to the bridge, it seems to be a totally original 1964 Fender with clay dots, a mint-green guard, and relatively clean hardware. But once you gaze upon the heavily weathered bottom edge of the body, things come into focus: this guitar has clearly taken some water damage at some point.

While the finish is in otherwise lovely condition, the lower portion of the body is utterly bare. Jay speculates that the guitar was stored upright in a basement that flooded – a satisfying explanation, given that it lines up with the placement of the damage, but a mundane one nonetheless. On his website, Rosen asks: "Would you rather have this oar or a new guitar?" We prefer to imagine that this Jag has been used as such.

7 Old flame: Reeder's 1948 Gibson J-200 is an example of one of the first maple-backed guitars in the line

8 Green state: Check out the patina on Mike Reeder's 1956 Gibson Les Paul

9 Reeder's glorious 1961 Lake Placid Blue Fender Jazzmaster

10 Hell or high water: Jay Rosen suspects this 1964 Lake Placid Blue Fender Jaguar was damaged in a flood

11 Buffed up: Rosen's 1966 Fender Precision Bass has an ultra-rare Charcoal Frost Metallic finish

12 Whiter than white: Artie Leider's pristine Airline JB Hutto is the same model used by Jack White in The White Stripes

The real star of his display was a 1966 Precision Bass in a shockingly clean, unfaded Charcoal Frost Metallic (11). CFM is one of Fender's rarer finishes. Seeing it in person, in its original steely blue-grey, is really something special. Generally, this colour tends to fade to a brownish-olive hue as the clear coat yellows from exposure. Jay suspects the clear coat may have been buffed to remove said ageing. In fact, there's just a hint of that going on around the pickguard on the treble side cutaway. Just an incredible vintage piece.

MCKENZIE RIVER MUSIC

Artie Leider of McKenzie River Music in Eugene, Oregon, lured our gaze with a beautiful, clean Airline JB Hutto in the brightest red we'd seen in years (12). This is the model that Jack White slung around his shoulder during the reign of garage-rock supremos The White Stripes. This example was totally original and set up beautifully.

13

McKenzie River Music revels in the rare and unique, and one special instrument at the booth called out to us almost immediately: a Takamine Archtop from the 1960s (13). Artie gave us a quick tour.

Takamine has dabbled only briefly in archtop guitars during its 60 year history. This particular example, Artie tells us, is a prototype, one of only a handful of which were produced. The guitar is equipped with an onboard pickup system, an oddly shaped white plastic pickguard, and a classy trapeze tailpiece.

GUITAR CENTER HOLLYWOOD

We caught up with our friend and former *Guitar.com* interview subject Nick Conte of Guitar Center, and as always he had a few rare treats to show off. One was a black Gretsch Tenor Duo Jet from 1954, made just like its six-string counterpart with four-pole Dynasonic pickups, a four-string neck, and 'G' cutout tailpiece.

Tucked under the table was a Gibson model produced for only two years. When Nick pulled out the exceedingly clean 1964 Thunderbird bass (14), our jaws hit the floor. Not only is this piece outstanding in its features and for its low production numbers, it's also in fantastic condition. Although the bass has clearly been played, it hasn't been abused; the finish is bright and clean, with only the most minor of incursions. And with its two original giant T-Bird pickups, it's not difficult to imagine the kind of earth-shaking sounds this thing must put out.

The bass also sports its original mute mechanism – essentially springs mounted to the top of the body underneath the strings by the bridge – which exerts pressure on tiny foam pads, which in turn make contact with the strings and make the Gibson sound more like an upright. As one of only about 60 in existence, it was a real honour that we got to spend some time with it.

14

ATB GUITARS

UK vintage aficionado Mike Long from ATB Guitars flagged us down on the show floor. Mike wasn't presenting, just window-shopping, but that didn't mean he didn't have something extraordinary to show us. After a quick catch-up, he led us out to his car to unveil to us his latest score: a remarkable Bigsby-equipped Cherry 1959 Gibson ES-330TDC (15).

These guitars just didn't come in Cherry in 1959, unless they were custom-ordered, so there are probably only one or two others in existence. Other curiosities include its ES-345-style parallelogram inlays and a custom-engraved truss-rod cover that bears the name of its former owner, one Heidi Barkentin. Heidi was a client of one of Gibson's many teaching schools in the late 1950s, and one of their agents frequently ordered Cherry instruments. This Bigsby-equipped beauty is such a special guitar, and if you'd like to know the full story, head on over to atbguitars.com.

13 Artie Leider's 1960s Takamine archtop prototype is one of only a few ever made

14 Thunder clap: Nick Conte's 1964 Gibson Thunderbird still has its original mute mechanism

15

16

17

15 This hyper-rare 1959 Cherry Gibson ES-330TDC was snapped up by Mike Long of ATB Guitars in the UK

16 Wear and tear: Shai Ashkenazi's 1958 sunburst Stratocaster has seen plenty of action

17 Wild cherry: Shai Ashkenazi's 1964 Epiphone Crestwood Custom is incredibly clean

IMPERIAL VINTAGE

Meeting up with Shai Ashkenazi of Imperial Vintage Guitars is always a pleasure and regular readers will be familiar with him thanks to our recent guide to guitar-shopping in LA. First, he pulled out a lovely '58 Strat in original three-tone sunburst (16). It's been played hard over the years, as evidenced by the wear on the maple fretboard caused by vigorous strumming in the neck position. Despite this, the original plastics are bright and clean, and the hardware has patina but isn't totally corroded. Perhaps its former owner never played down by the bridge.

Among the other gems Shai had with him was an example of one of his favourite 1960s Epiphone models: a 1964 Crestwood Custom (17). The naming conventions of these guitars can be confusing so here's a hint: most Customs of this era feature two pickups and oval inlays; the Custom Deluxes have three pickups and the usual big block inlays of a Les Paul Custom; if it's a Wilshire, it'll have two pickups and dot inlays; if it has a single pickup, it's a Coronet.

This Crestwood Custom retains its original Cherry finish, its two barking, biting mini-humbuckers, and its delightful Tremotone tailpiece. Dig that long, white, dolphin-like pickguard and the output jack placed between sets of controls. It's quirky, it's cool and they're good instruments to boot.

SOUND ASSESSMENT

After leaving the show, we realised that we hadn't needed earplugs, we weren't yelling our questions, and we hadn't had to battle through capacity crowds just to get a glimpse at something that piqued our interest. As we drove back to NAMM, the Amigo show started to seem a lot more attractive. G

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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

TONE MACHINES

Much is made of the desirability of pre-CBS Fenders, but how does a 1952 Telecaster from the golden era compare to a model from 1968? Time to find out if the answer is as cut and dried as you might think…

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

ABOVE The ’68 model’s CBS-era headstock logo is a telltale sign of its age, but both necks were sprayed with nitrocellulose

OPPOSITE This ’52 Tele was refinished in its factory blonde for its appearance in the 2015 Hank Williams biopic, *I Saw The Light*

In the vintage guitar market, the terms ‘pre-CBS’ and ‘CBS-era’ have become pretty loaded. Leo Fender sold his companies to the giant Columbia Broadcasting System on 5 January 1965, and any product made by Fender prior to that date is unequivocally classed as ‘pre-CBS’. But what about those that came not long after?

The distinction is crucial because the values of Fender guitars made a matter of weeks apart can vary dramatically. Much hinges on which side of the takeover date the guitar happened to be made, along with various other features, but it’s actually a grey area. For some time, Fender guitars remained essentially unchanged and Leo Fender carried on working for CBS in a consultancy role for a couple more years.

CBS instituted changes to manufacturing processes, largely for monetary rather than musical reasons, but these were rolled out gradually. The upshot is that the full gamut of features that typify the CBS era, and made it notorious, weren’t fully in place until late 1968. Some came later still.

STRUMMER OF LOVE

The 1968 Olympic White Telecaster featured here is right on the cusp and showcases a combination of pre-CBS and CBS-era features. Most importantly, Fender still had stocks of lightweight ash, so the body feels like an old one. Peeking under the control plate, it’s clear that Fender was still using cloth-insulated wire for pickups and control wiring, rather than PVC. Best of all, the necks were still being sprayed with nitrocellulose lacquer.

The same can’t be said of the body, but at least its tougher finish has managed to survive well and age gracefully. That said, the neck is in fine shape, too, but there’s still sufficient patina to make some observations about the wear patterns.

Almost all of the lacquer checking is confined to the front and back of the headstock. There’s a small area on the heel where it protrudes from the body, but none of the checking compromises the integrity of the finish and besides two small marks, the lacquer on the back of the neck is in perfect, unworn condition.

The Olympic White finish retains its original creamy hue and has managed to avoid turning mustard. Under the pickguard the colour is a shade lighter, but almost identical, and we can assume this is pretty much what the finish looked like when it was sprayed at the factory.

There are plenty of dents and a few small chips, but none of the crazing we would expect to see if the body finish was nitrocellulose. You can tell that Fender was spraying its new poly finishes quite thinly, and there’s even some playing induced rub-through on the lower bout.

By 1968, Fender had settled on a headstock logo, with a bolder and blacker look than the earlier ‘spaghetti’ and ‘transition’ designs. Some have speculated that the CBS executives were keen for the headstock decals to show up better on television and this reinforced branding initiative was extended to the F-stamped neck plate, and bespoke tuners that replaced the double-line Klusons.

FENDER
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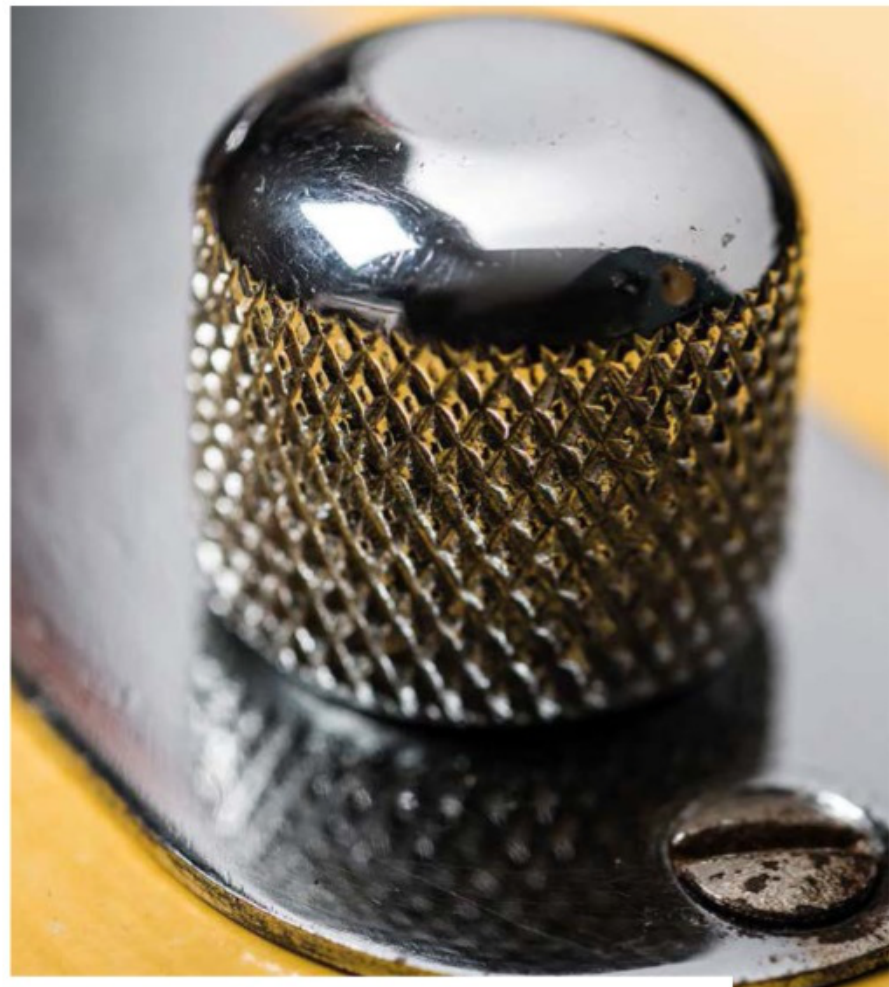


KEY FEATURES

1952 FENDER TELECASTER
PRICE £15,995
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid ash body, bolt-on one-piece maple neck
HARDWARE 3x brass saddle bridge, Kluson no-line tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 648mm/25.5”
NECK WIDTH 41.8mm at nut, 50.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 24.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.2mm at nut, 53.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 6.75lb/3.06kg
FINISH Blonde (refinished)
CONTACT atbguitars.com

TOP LEFT The ‘no-line’ Kluson tuners are period-correct for a Blackguard and while one appears to be slightly different to the others in type, the patina is identical, so the guitar may have left the factory with this mismatched sextet

TOP RIGHT Fender’s knurled knobs had a domed top at this point

BOTTOM LEFT The neck and fretboard show plenty of playing wear, but this is an extremely comfortable guitar to play

In one of the few CBS-era moves that garnered widespread approval, Fender finally abandoned 1950s Telecaster wiring with its faux-bass preset. Players had been requesting this for years, and reconfiguring the wiring to a now-conventional neck/both/bridge arrangement was commonplace.

Fender made the change in late 1967 and introduced another new feature – a 0.001uF ceramic capacitor was wired across the volume potentiometer lugs so players could turn down without losing treble. You might call it the golden era of vintage Telecaster wiring, but it was short-lived.

In 1969, Fender made the now-bewildering decision to put 1-meg potentiometers into Telecasters for added brightness. When combined with ever thinner and brighter sounding CBS-era pickups, as well as the treble bleed cap, the results could be rather brittle. Fortunately, this 1968 model was fitted with 250k CTS potentiometers, which date to the latter part of 1965.

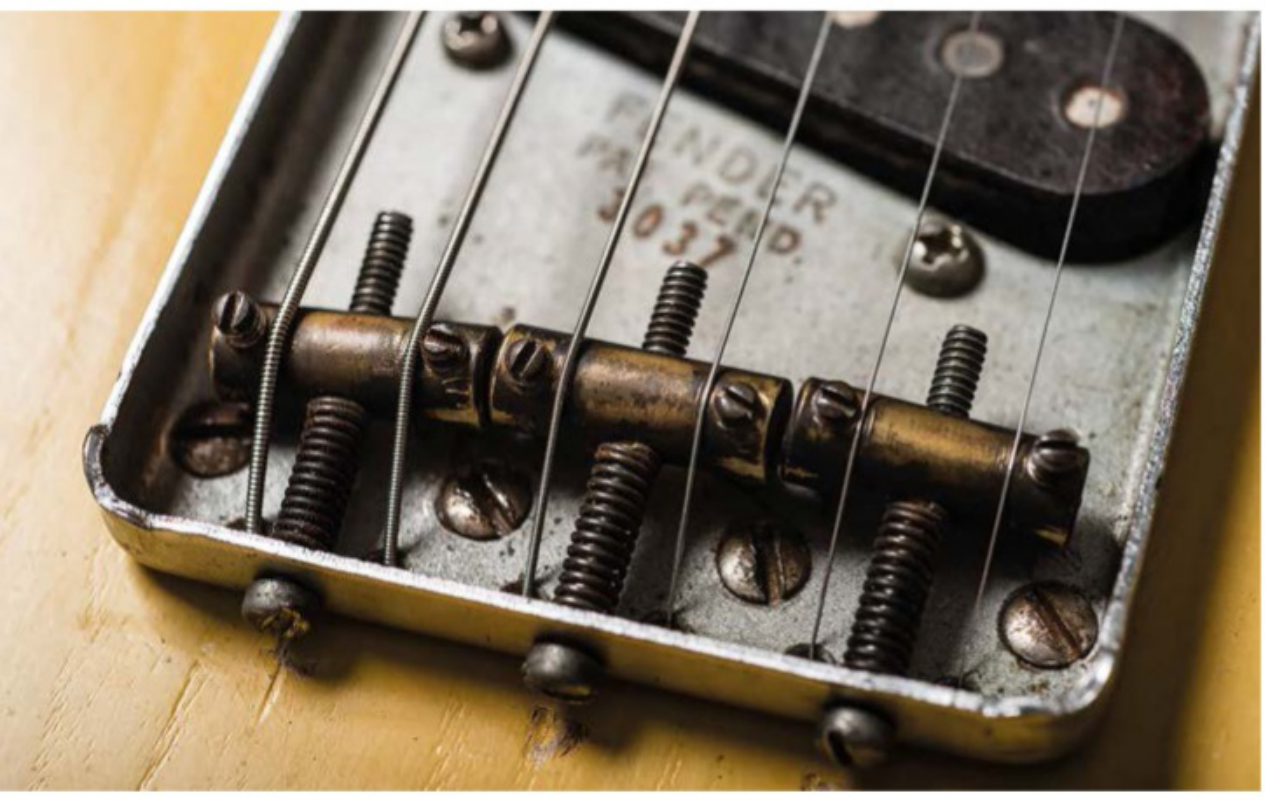
Fender introduced rosewood veneer fingerboards in 1963, and this remained the favoured construction method for ‘rosewood necks’ until 1980. The change to pearloid dot markers may have been driven by the need for something tougher and classier than the previous clay dots. Although associated with the CBS era, Fender started introducing them in 1964, and yes, they did prove to be more durable.

This guitar’s fingerboard displays no discernible playwear and there are years left in the factory fitted frets. Although Fender would sometimes use pau ferro as well as rosewood during the late 1960s, the colour and swirly grain pattern of this fingerboard look like Indian rosewood. Having hopefully established this ’68 model’s credentials for taking on the ’52, it’s time to move on.

MOVIE STAR

Saying a 1952 Blackguard Telecaster has some history might seem like a statement of the obvious, but this guitar has been in the movies – it was apparently used as a period-correct prop in 2015 Hank Williams biopic *I Saw The Light*. Getting into character always means dressing for the part and since this guitar had previously been stripped to natural wood, the production company specified that it should be restored to factory blonde.

The refinish was carried out by Don Opperman, who previously worked as a guitar tech for Stevie Ray Vaughan and Joe Walsh. It’s not the most



TOP RIGHT The controls and wiring are all-original, but that's not necessarily the best thing from a modern player's perspective

MIDDLE LEFT The bridge features the original brass saddles, while the bridge pickup has been rewound – though it still sounds good

MIDDLE RIGHT The initials 'JD' are scratched under the Blackguard's pickguard

BOTTOM The spring of the three-way switch is so tight we can't wedge it in the 'in-between' positions that offer some of the best tones

accomplished relic finish we've seen, but to be fair to Mr Opperman, it was done in a tremendous hurry due to the film's tight production schedule.

Clearly any future owner would have the option of a top-notch refin, and you'd still be saving a ton of money on the cost of an all-original instrument. Of course, much of the guitar's value depends on the condition of the neck and the originality of the parts, and on that front it's mostly good news.

The neck finish is totally original, and the decal is in such fine condition, it looks almost new. All the hardware is correct for a 1952 Telecaster, too, including the bridge, brass saddles and no-line Kluson tuners.

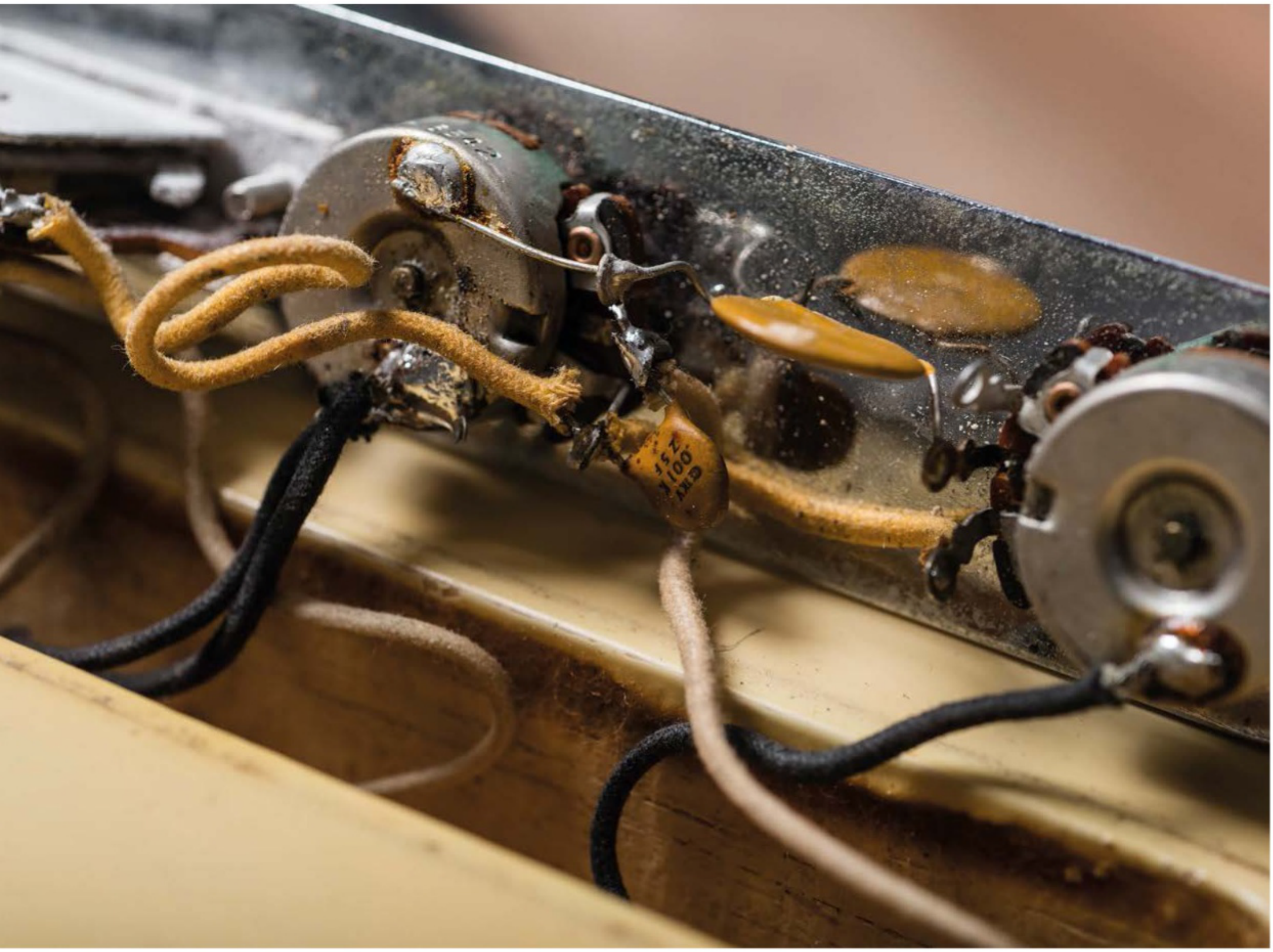
One tuner differs from the rest because it has a second post hole, but the fact that it is also a no-line unit indicates it was made between 1953 and 1956. Sources differ on the specific dates, so the suggestion that it could have been on the guitar from new isn't beyond the realms of possibility. Its patina is absolutely identical to the other five, so it's hardly a deal breaker. But if it's a concern, you may find a vintage parts dealer who will offer a straight swap.

On the control side, things are all original, too – but as we discussed earlier, that's something of a mixed blessing. The three-way switch gives you the neck pickup with a preset treble roll-off, the neck pickup alone and the bridge pickup. Both pickups are routed to the tone control, but the switch spring is so strong that we can't get it to stay in the unofficial in-between position that we've been able to coax from original Blackguards in the past.

OPPOSITE The '68 has a poly finish on the body, so the colour is likely the same as when it left the factory

TOP By 1968, the bridge had threaded steel saddles instead of the Blackguard's brass

BOTTOM RIGHT Domed knobs were replaced with flat-topped ones by this stage



ABOVE The ’68 features factory neck/both/bridge wiring, and 250k CTS pots – it can be argued this was the golden period of vintage Tele wiring

It’s also interesting to observe how the pickup wires were originally pushed through eyelets in the switch wafer before being soldered to the tags. It’s a very neat, old-school way of doing it, and possibly provides a bit of strain relief too.

Here we come to this guitar’s second significant issue. Although the neck pickup works perfectly, the bridge pickup’s coil had broken down was rewound by House Of Tone pickups. The correct 42-gauge plain enamel magnet wire was used, and the original wrapping string was reinstated.

You may also notice that the bridge pickup and strap button screws are cross-heads rather than flat-heads, but both are an easy fix. The black pickguard itself is a repro, but Ivison Guitars has done such a stellar job, we might not have noticed if we weren’t forewarned.

IN USE

Both of these Telecasters have ash bodies and the weights are not too far apart, but the unplugged tones are distinct. They sustain impressively and have an airy chime, but the ’52 has more shimmer and the ’68 has extra midrange warmth and weight.

The main point of difference is on the wound strings, where the ’52 pops and twangs while the ’68 has a slightly more muted and woody quality. That could have something to do with the 1968 model having steel saddles rather than brass, or the replaced nut needing a bit of fettling. Or maybe it’s just an older set of strings, because we have never found late-60s Teles to be shy in the twang department.

Regarding playing feel, these guitars are closer than you might expect. The ’52 doesn’t have a particularly fat neck profile and it isn’t the work of Tadeo Gomez, who applied his sculpting skills (and signature) to the body rather than the neck of this guitar.

It has the softest of ‘C’ profiles along its entire length, and it doesn’t feel clubby in any way. In fact, this neck has an extremely comfortable and surprisingly modern feel, and even with the slightly worn frets it’s fast and effortless to play.

The ’68 neck has a slightly fuller ‘C’ profile, with a gently tapering depth that’s just as comfortable and effortless. We prefer the smooth satin feel of the ’52 neck, but if the pampered ’68 were subjected to a couple of years of serious gigging, it would probably end up feeling much the same.

Through a tweed Deluxe, the ’68 sounds astonishing. The bridge pickup is bright and fat, and there’s nothing shrill about it. The neck pickup has

KEY FEATURES

1968 FENDER TELECASTER
PRICE £7,495
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid ash body, bolt-on maple neck with rosewood fingerboard veneer
HARDWARE 3x steel saddle bridge, F-brand tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 648mm/25.5”
NECK WIDTH 40.9mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.3mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.4mm at nut, 54.35mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.09lb/3.22kg
FINISH Olympic White
CONTACT atbguitars.com

the softened highs we associate with the breed, yet it’s super clear and warm. It’s also perfectly balanced with the bridge pickup, and that’s fundamental for the great in-between setting.

The value of the treble bleed cap was poorly chosen because the tone becomes way too thin when you turn the volume down. But other than that, this ’68 has phenomenal tonal depth and range, and it snarls, bites and clangs with the best 1960s Teles.

When compared to the original ’54 lap steel pickup in our own Tele, we can tell the ’52 model’s bridge pickup hasn’t suffered from being rewound. It has more chime, quack and cluck than the ’68, but we also find the string-to-string balance more even and it’s somehow refined as well as a bit wild. The neck pickup is a tad jazzier and darker than the Olympic White guitar’s unit, but it’s still an eminently usable tone.

We can’t rewire the controls, but we can clip a jumper cable across the switch to hear both pickups together and the result is breathtaking. The midrange scoops, the natural compression is accentuated and a phasiness comes in that’s perfect for country picking. We also find the ’52 sustains a little longer.

Rewiring a guitar’s controls potentially devalues a guitar by casting doubt on the originality of the finish. But when it’s a known refin, this isn’t an issue and we would change this ’52 to ‘modern’ spec in a heartbeat – the pseudo bass setting really isn’t useful at all. As for the refinish, well it almost halves the value without negatively impacting tone or playability. So, go figure.

The ’68 is equally fabulous in a snappier, edgier and punkier sort of way. As an instrument it’s as different to the 1952 model as a mid 60s Strat would be to a ’54, or a 1953 Goldtop would be to a Burst. Ultimately, it’s a matter of taste, but we know that the Blackguard will live longest in our memory.

LEFT The fingerboard appears to be Indian rosewood, and there’s plenty of life left in the factory-fitted frets

RIGHT Cloth-insulated wire was still being used for the pickups and controls when this guitar was made – Fender would switch to PVC-insulated wire soon after

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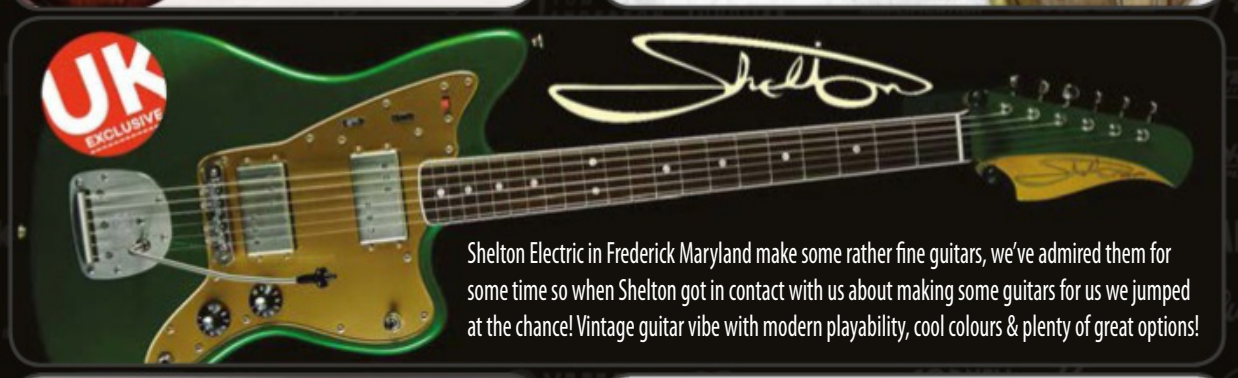

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GRETSCH
G2622TG-P90 LIMITED EDITION STREAMLINER

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS HUW PRICE

With a pair of P-90 pickups and a centre-block, this isn't your average Gretsch – but it certainly makes a statement…

Gretsch says this special-run model from its affordable Streamliner range was designed with three key factors in mind: "high gain-friendly performance, slick, easy playability and spectacular style."

It's certainly the first time we've seen Candy Apple Red applied with a muted satin finish like this, and combined with the gold-plated hardware and the tortoiseshell pickguard, this is a guitar that's guaranteed to get you noticed. The aged-white body binding tops off the look, although there are a few stray patches of colour that the scraper missed.

The appearance may be contemporary Gretsch to a tee, but there are other features that are less frequently associated with the brand. The licensed Bigsby B70 vibrato is teamed with an anchored Adjusto-Matic bridge and it may surprise you to see a pair of cream covered P-90 pickups. Less obvious is a chambered spruce block running through the centre line of the laminated maple, double-cutaway body.

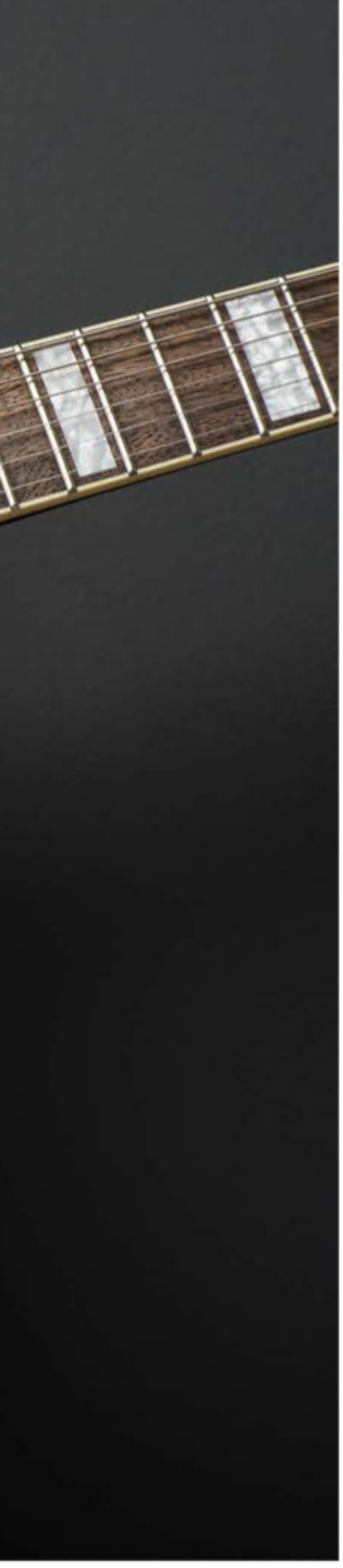
In addition to the three-way pickup selector and a slightly crowded arrangement of individual pickup volume controls and a master tone, there's a master volume on the treble-side horn.

KEY FEATURES

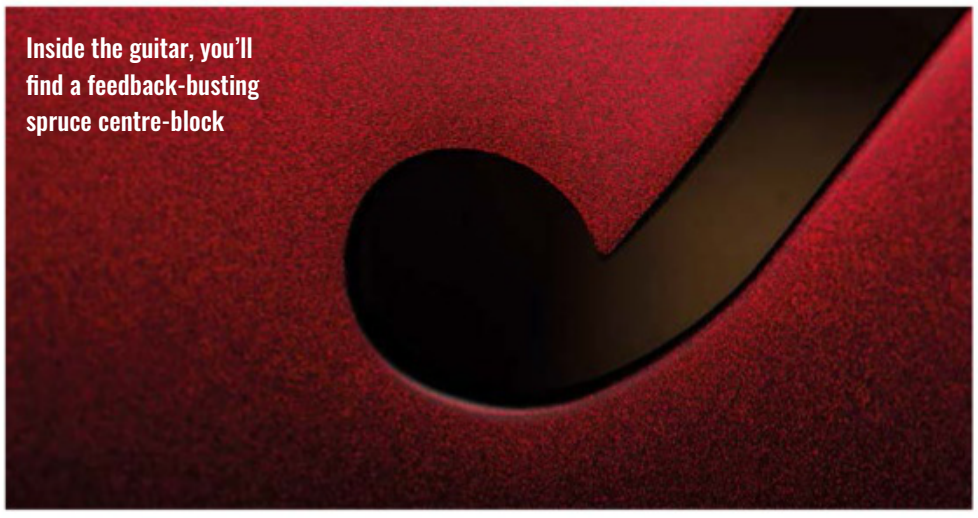
PRICE £559
DESCRIPTION Semi-solid electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Laminated maple body with chambered spruce centre block, maple set neck with 'Standard U' profile, 12" radius laurel fingerboard with pearloid block inlays and 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Gold Bigsby-Licensed B70 vibrato, Adjusto-Matic bridge, die-cast tuners, black plastic knobs
ELECTRICS 2x P-90 pickups, master volume, master tone, individual pickup volume controls, three-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 628mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.4mm at first fret, 24.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.7mm at nut, 51.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.25kg/7.16lb
LEFT HANDERS No
FINISHES Candy Apple Red satin
CONTACT gretschguitars.com

IN USE

Before we plug in, the G2622TG produces an exceptionally vibrant, loud and full tone. There's ample sustain and the substantial and solid quality of single notes complements a chiming twang



Gold standard: all hardware is gold-plated, including these die-cast tuners



Inside the guitar, you'll find a feedback-busting spruce centre-block

Satin Candy Apple Red is definitely a different look for Gretsch

that is undeniably Gretsch-y. It's all very encouraging, but can those P-90 pickups do it justice?

It turns out they can, and the tone even compares very favourably with a pair of 1953 soapbars in a Goldtop and a pair of dog-ears in a '56 ES-225 that we have to hand. We hear a wonderful contrast between the two P-90s in the Gretsch. The bridge has a snarly vintage quack and the neck is sweeter, more rounded and flute-like.

Our initial concerns about the bridge pickup's distance from the bridge are quickly dispelled. The gap is sizeable, but shifting the pickup closer to the centre introduces a touch of midrange honk reminiscent of the oft-overlooked middle position on a Strat. There's also plenty of room for picking adjacent to the bridge and sufficient space to play fingerstyle without anything getting in the way.

Neither pickup is as bright as the P-90s in our mid-60s ES-330, but for vintage sounds and high gain, the more refined

Soap and glory: the P-90 pickups star in this guitar

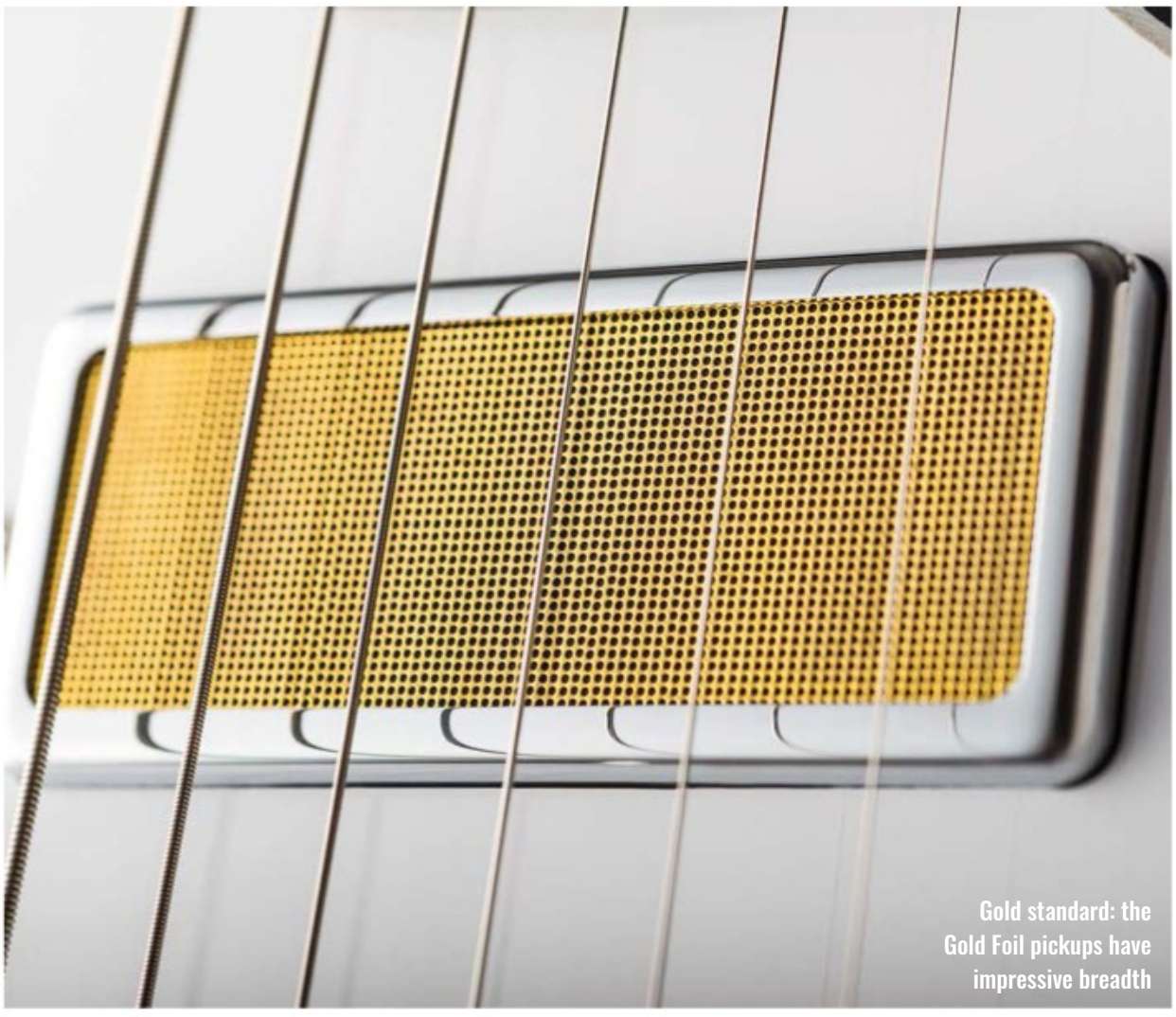
treble is an asset. The G2622TG-P90 produces huge overdriven tones and sustains like a solidbody, while both pickups maintain clarity and definition. This really is a remarkable all-rounder.

There are hints of Casino and ES-335, and yet despite the pickups, there's always something Gretsch-y going on. The flattish neck profile is very much a Gretsch thing, and with the impressive fretwork, we can't criticise the playability. We appreciate the stiffer than usual Bigsby spring too, and tuning stability is excellent. Gretsch purists may disapprove and the looks won't be for everybody, but there's no denying this is a very fine guitar.

9/10 **Traditional and non-traditional features combine to create a special guitar at an affordable price**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Ibanez AFS75T £539, Hofner HCT Verythin £665, Epiphone Uptown Kat ES £549



Gold standard: the Gold Foil pickups have impressive breadth

Due to the position of the jack socket, it's advisable to use an angled cable

HARMONY
STANDARD SERIES SILHOUETTE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Combining vampy looks with a pair of foil-topped mini-humbuckers, the reborn Harmony range's resident offset promises distinctive tones to match its premium build

They say you should never go back. Of course you can – the trick is to go back but then come slightly forwards again. For example, when reviving a guitar brand best known for its 1960s catalogue models, you might want to keep the basic designs but improve and update them for the demands of modern players. This is the thinking behind the new Harmony solidbodies, and we really can't argue with it.

Our recent review of the Jupiter and Rebel models praised their elegance, all-American build quality and versatile tones. The Silhouette, though, is something a little different. With mini versions of the other guitars' Gold Foil humbuckers and Fender-style alder/maple construction instead of mahogany, it looks like an altogether more perky proposition.

The background, in case you missed it, is as follows: in the days before Asian imports, Harmony was the budget brand of choice for American guitarists. Its Chicago factory churned out huge numbers of affordable guitars before finally going to the wall in 1975… and that was pretty much it until the brand was revived in 2018 by BandLab Technologies, the Singapore-based company that – full-disclosure klaxon – also recently acquired *Guitar.com* and *Guitar Magazine*.

BandLab Technologies is also a partner of Heritage Guitars, current custodians of the original Gibson factory at 225 Parsons Street in Kalamazoo, Michigan. And that's where these new Harmony instruments are also built – some pedigree.

All of which brings us to the Silhouette. It's aptly named: that contoured body is fearlessly sleek and sexy, like a non-reverse Firebird's more alluring sibling… an effect that's only slightly undermined by the excessive acreage of empty pickguard above the neck pickup. It's a pity – a slightly smaller guard might have transformed this guitar from 'pretty but gawky' to 'pretty damn gorgeous'.

Incidentally, if you've seen pictures of the Silhouette in this Slate finish on the Harmony website, you might have been expecting a dark metallic blue with a hint of sapphire. Our review guitar, however, is as grey as a March sky in Middlesbrough. We're not complaining, although the Pearl White option is surely the most lustable of the three colours on offer.

Like the Jupiter and Rebel, this Harmony has a medium 'C' neck shape with a modern 12-inch radius, held in place by three neatly recessed bolts on a gently curved heel. As on the other guitars, you get 22 medium jumbo frets; these have been dressed well enough but the edges of the ebony fretboard itself have not been rounded off at all, which could be a real annoyance for some players. Scale length is the same in-betweeny 25 inches as the other models.

While the headstock is broadly Fender-ish in style, just as it was on the Silhouettes of the 60s, it's angled back rather than recessed, so you won't want to lay this guitar flat on the floor like your favourite indestructible Telecaster. But the locking tuners are suitably classy and the sawn-off Tele-style bridge has compensated barrel saddles.

Regardless of whether these pickups have much in common with original DeArmond or Teisco Gold Foils in terms of construction, they look tremendously cool. Both of ours read around 7.1k for DC resistance, which is about what you'd expect from Firebird pickups.

IN USE

We've got a slight problem with this guitar before we even plug it in… and plugging in is the problem, thanks to the output jack's position on the rear edge. It's fine on a strap, but unless your cable has an angled jack, it's impossible to rest the Silhouette on a low stand – or even lean it against the sofa for a moment while you let the cat out – without unplugging it first.

It's a minor design flaw, but an infuriating one because it's so needless. Luckily, it's hard to stay infuriated at this thing for long. In fact, once you start playing, there's

Barrel rolls: as with other new Harmony guitars, the chopped T-style bridge has compensated saddles

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,049 (inc Mono Vertigo gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody double-cutaway guitar, made in USA
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck, 12" radius ebony fingerboard with 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Locking tuners, custom chopped T-style bridge with compensated saddles
ELECTRICS 2x Gold Foil mini-humbuckers, master volume and tone with Orange Drop capacitor, three-way toggle pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 25"/635mm
NECK WIDTH 41.6mm at nut, 52.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.2mm at first fret, 23.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.3kg/7.3lb
FINISH Slate (as reviewed), Pearl White or Champagne nitrocellulose
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT harmony.co

The distinctive cupcake knobs are highly usable

a good chance that cat will be begging to come back in.

The common theme to all three pickup positions here is spank. Make no mistake, in pure EQ terms this is a very trebly guitar, but that doesn't mean it's shrill: it can make even a Jazzmaster sound slightly dull in comparison, yet we never find ourselves reaching for the tone control to take the edge off of things. There's a snappiness to clean tones, especially when digging in on chords, that could make you think someone's turned on a really good compressor while you weren't looking.

Those 'cupcake' control knobs are highly usable if you do feel the need to quieten things down or dial in a more mellow voice – and there's enough thumpy note definition to make jazzy runs on the neck pickup viable – but it's in the bridge position that this Harmony really connects with its 60s garage-rock heritage.

That's not to say it's in any way lo-fi or 'budget'. This is about as un-trashy as solidbody guitars get, but throw it just a scrap of overdrive and it'll produce the kind of snarling upper-midrange twang that can write riffs by itself. Make that more than a scrap and you'll appreciate how the crispness of a mini-humbucker helps it cut through a mix like nothing else.

The show-stopping act of this wide-ranging performance, though, is surely the middle position – and for that we need to turn the gain back down and make some space for its clucky goodness to shine through. This really is the epitome of characterful clarity; for any kind of arpeggios, half-chords or brisk indie strumming, you'll struggle to find a sweeter tone.

Perfect 10s are few and far between, but if it had a better-proportioned scratchplate, rolled fretboard edges and an output socket that knew its place, the Harmony Silhouette would get full marks. G

9/10 **A well-made and quite irresistible Firebird/Telecaster hybrid**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Firebird £1,599, Supro Silverwood £1,049, Kauer Arcturus £TBC

Honeyboy AMPS

Custom built for you

CLASSIC HANDMADE TUBE AMPLIFIERS

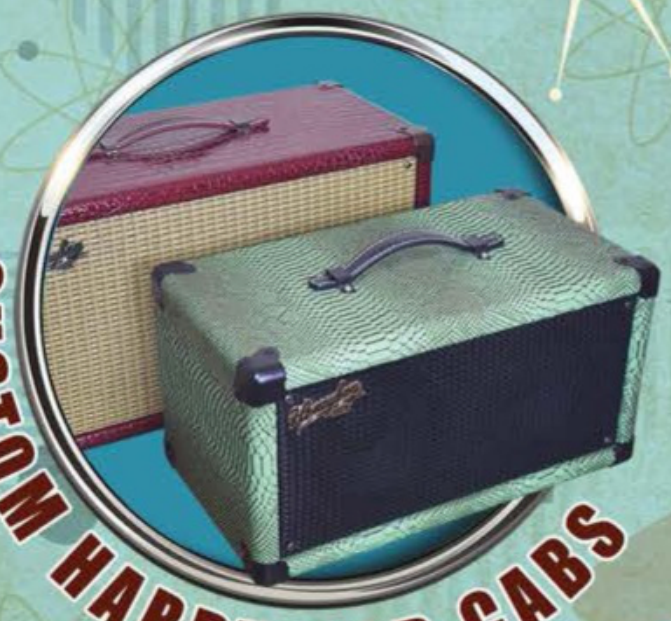
Fantastic Amps. The cabs are pretty special. The oak gives the amps a nice focus. I fell in love with the 3x10, best one I've played. (30w)

Tommy Harkenrider

Don't Start me talkin'

Touch Sensitivity, outstanding dynamics and superb tone. Two fabulously usable channels with massive sonic scale. Classic tweed tone without any compromises, paired with truly outstanding build quality. (30w 3x10)

The Guitar Magazine



CUSTOM HARDWOOD CABS

Excellent, I'm surprised how full it sounds. To my ears it's more complex because of the interacting alnico and ceramic speakers (2x8 Cab)

Steve, West Sussex

AWESOME ROCK 'N' ROLL

Honeyboy AMPS Range

5w, 18w, 30w Combos
Speaker Cab formats:
1x12 2x6 2x8 2x10 2x12

Hand-wired classic 1950's circuits
Hand-built tone-enhancing hardwood cabinets
Wide range of stand-out finishes

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GORDON SMITH
GS-0 SPECIAL

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

UK electric guitar specialist Gordon Smith wheels out a pawn-shop infused blues machine in collaboration with Forsyth's Music…

Picture the scene – Gordon Smith, UK-based purveyor of handcrafted electric guitars since back 1974, meets at a moonlit crossroads with the team from Forsyth's Music, one of England's longest running guitar shops – to collaborate on the GS-0 Special, a new instrument inspired by 20th century pawnshop wonders from brands such as Silvertone and Airline.

The non-cutaway silhouette is experiencing something of a resurgence lately in the work of luthiers such as Patch Rubin of Wide Sky Guitars, and this is certainly not another LP Junior. One look at this quirky six-string – a solidbody homage to the two-tone archtops from the old Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogues – will divide opinion with surgical precision.

The GS-0 Special sees Gordon Smith forgoing sunburst or TV Yellow visuals in favour of a Sea Foam Green and white chevron motif over the Brazilian cedar neck and body. It's an unapologetically brash variation of the 'P-90 on a stick' theme. In this case, the pickup in question is a Gordon Smith unit with chicken-head knobs for volume and tone. We're not sure if the use of different shades of cream plastic for the knobs and the pickup cover and large archtop-style scratchplate detracts from the look or not, but the chrome tailpiece is a nice touch.

The otherwise-friendly rosewood 'board is topped with a well cut, screwed-in brass nut – another polarising feature – but the glued-in neck, featuring a slim 'C' carve, brings a welcome touch of sophistication as the original catalogue archtops that inspired this guitar offer a uniformly porcine playing experience by today's standards.

IN USE

While initial clean sound explorations offer slightly nasal and brash tones that aren't immediately inspiring, once we plug into the angry end of an early Cornford Hurricane, all bets are off. The GS-0 Special is a screaming, howling blues machine.

A bridge-mounted P-90 is always liable to cause a ruckus, but in this case it's particularly bellicose and while the tone control does serve to take some of the edge off the top end, the guitar retains its character throughout.

From on-edge proto-punk to rock's seedy underbelly, this unlikely beast has some real moves. Dropping into open D and G tunings and applying a slide takes us into

Grover tuners adorn the white-finished headstock

Top brass: the standard GS brass nut is present and correct

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £999 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in the UK
BUILD Brazilian cedar body, glued-in Brazilian cedar neck, 12-inch radius rosewood fretboard, brass nut, 'shallow C' neck profile, 22 medium frets
HARDWARE Grover tuners, tune-o-matic style bridge and trapeze tailpiece
ELECTRONICS 1x P-90 pickup, volume and tone knobs
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Seafoam Green, Ruby Red and Vintage Gold acid-catalysed lacquers
CONTACT forsyths.co.uk, gordonsmithguitars.com

particularly gnarly territory. It's tempting to load it with heavy gauge strings for extra girth but even box-fresh, fans of blues and garage-rock artists such as Bob Log III, T-Model Ford, and The Neckbones will adore this guitar.

Whether you will love it just as much will depend on the strength of your passion for the esoteric. This may not be a guitar for the Wood Library enthusiast, but if you've had your head turned by weird-ass retro instruments over the past decade, you're unlikely to find one that was made with the same evident amount of affection as the GS-0 Special.

Holy roller: the rosewood 'board is nicely finished for maximum comfort

The single P-90 pickup loves high-gain tones

7/10 **You'll know just by looking at it if you want one... or if you don't**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Supro Ozark £1,099, Rivolta Combinata I £860, Epiphone Les Paul Junior £329

HONEYBOY AMPS
MINI-TWIN SPEAKER CABINETS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS HUW PRICE

With towering stacks going the way of the dodo, many guitarists are looking for compact and lightweight speaker cabs for their pedalboard amps and micro-heads. Honeyboy has the sweetest of solutions…

Low-wattage amps have become a common sight at gigs. But they can suffer sonically when their cabinet size is restricted, and there's perhaps only a single eight-inch speaker onboard. For the thousands of players using lunchbox heads or pedalboard amps, it makes sense to pair their gear with a speaker cab that allows them to maintain a downsized rig but doesn't compromise on tone.

This is where Andy Smith comes in. The founder of Glasgow-based Honeyboy Amps recently released a pair of positively crocodilian new Mini-Twin cabinets in 2x6 and 2x8 inch configurations. Each comes equipped with Jensen speakers, with the former combining a P6V with a C6V, and the latter integrating a P8V with a C8V. The P and C refer to alnico and ceramic magnets, respectively.

The cabs are hand-made from oak, with sapele soon to be an option, too. The baffle boards are cut from plywood, which is 9mm thick in the 2x6 and 12mm thick in the 2x8. We love the reptilian look on amps and cabs (providing it's not real alligator or snakeskin, of course) and here a vivid green Black Mamba covering combines with black speaker cloth and corner protectors on the 2×6, with the 2×8's glossier Burgundy Gator vinyl paired with wheat/gold sparkle cloth and bronze hammertone corners. 50s tweed-style faux-leather handles also feature.

The 2x6 is an open-back design, while the closed-back 2×8 has a removable centre panel. Both units are lightweight and wired in series for an 8-ohm load. Parallel wiring is also an option for amps requiring 4-ohms.

Lounge lizards: faux reptile skin lends the cabinets a louche look

Honey trap: the textured hardware finish adds to the unique aesthetic

Sweet talking: alnico and ceramic Jensen speakers combine for a classic sound

IN USE

You'd be forgiven for mistaking the 2x6 for an amp head when you unbox it – but the Honeyboy is too light for that. Connecting it to a vintage Fender Tweed Deluxe, its six-inch speakers handle the power with ease – unsurprisingly given the cab's 40-watt rating. But, more importantly, it doesn't sound boxy or constrained by its size.

The treble is slightly rolled-off and the bass is tight rather than deep, but there's a wide frequency range – we particularly like the throaty quality in the mids.

The 2x8 sounds brighter and a deeper, and we detect less midrange colouration. Like the 2x6, we find that it sounds better standing upright than sideways, and given the alnico-ceramic blend, you can choose which driver you prefer on top. Removing the 2x8's rear centre panel sees the tone open up and become more room-filling. Things sound a little livelier this way, and though it's at the expense of some low-end tightness, on balance, we prefer it.

Both of these cabinets fill a niche, are impressively made and sound very good indeed. They're even small enough to throw a washbag and a change of clothes inside, and fly with as carry-on luggage.

KEY FEATURES

MINI-TWIN 2X8
PRICE £394
DESCRIPTION 2x8" closed-back solid oak speaker cabinet with removable centre panel, made in the UK
POWER RATING 50W
SPEAKER Jensen P8V & C8V
DIMENSIONS 520 x 280 x 230mm
WEIGHT 8kg/17.6lb
OPTIONS Numerous custom finishes available, see website for details

9/10 **Balanced full-frequency tone with open and closed-back options, and impressive power-handling**

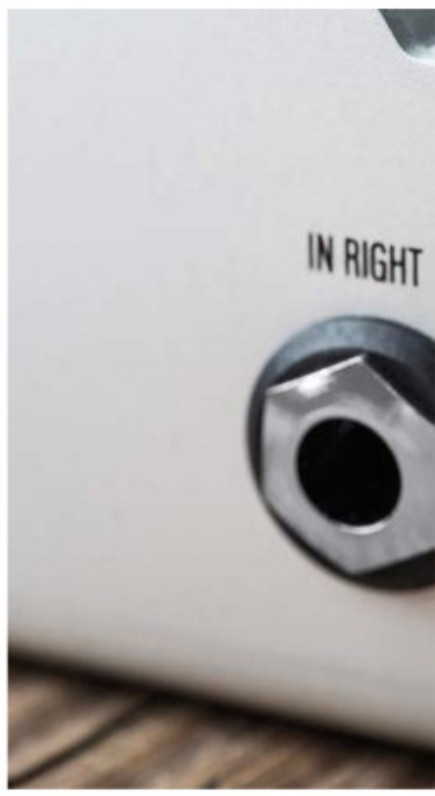
KEY FEATURES

MINI-TWIN 2X6
PRICE £360
DESCRIPTION 2x6" open-back solid oak speaker cabinet, made in the UK
POWER RATING 40W
SPEAKERS Jensen P6V & C6V
DIMENSIONS 430 x 220 x 230mm
WEIGHT 6kg/13.2lb
OPTIONS Numerous custom finishes available, see website for details
CONTACT honeyboyamps.com

9/10 **Unexpectedly loud and balanced, with pleasing midrange colouration and extreme portability**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Rift 2x8" £319, Orange PPC108 £75, DV Mark Jazz 208 £313



The D1 delay is an impressive debut for the Mako Series

WALRUS AUDIO
MAKO SERIES D1

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

As the first in a new flagship range of studio-grade effects from makers Walrus Audio, this high-fidelity stereo-delay pedal proves it has bite

Walrus Audio has a reputation for sonic excellence. Its initial range of pedals was released to universal acclaim in back in the early 2010s, but the Oklahoma company is clearly unwilling to rest on its laurels.

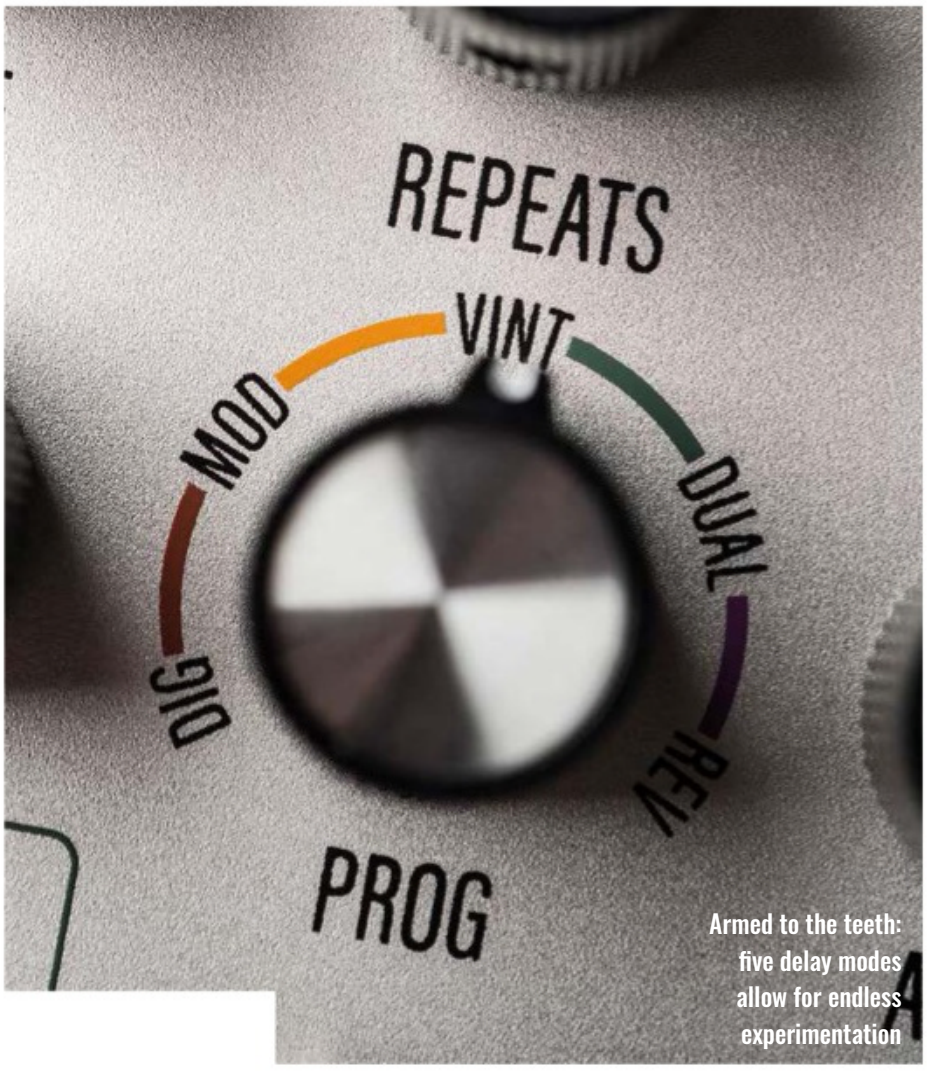
NAMM 2020 saw the debut of its Mako series, of which the first release is the D1 high-fidelity stereo delay. Aesthetically, the D1 is a world away from the original range – Walrus has ditched the brand's trademark whimsical illustrative graphics in favour of a stark visual language that takes its cues from industrial design. Its chrome detailing and gun-metal hues are backed up by solid build quality, and the kind of features that are more typically found in rack-mounted studio hardware.

At the heart of the D1 is a Sharc DSP processor chip and five delay programs: digital, modulated, vintage, dual and reverse. The repeats created by these can be sculpted with the time, mix, attack and repeats knobs, and there's an additional tweak knob that offers further versatility via a mini-toggle switch, which adds modulated, tone and age textures to the echoes.

As you'd expect, the D1 has a tap-tempo button and accompanying LED. But it also has a dual-function division switch that can be used to select two complimentary time divisions, which can be sent out of different sides of the stereo output, though this is only available in dual mode. There are nine internal preset banks that you can cycle through using both the footswitches simultaneously. Full MIDI functionality allows for even more storage, in addition to total MIDI-based control.

All in: as you'd expect for a high-end delay, stereo ins and outs are both catered for

Winning tweak: add one of three textures to your echoes



Armed to the teeth: five delay modes allow for endless experimentation

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £279
DESCRIPTION Stereo delay pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS Time, repeats, mix, tweak (plus mini toggle for modulation, tone and age), program (digital, modulated, vintage, dual, and reverse modes), attack, A/B/C memory bank selector switch, quarter, eighth and dotted-eighth division switch. Bypass and tap footswitches (select presets with both together) with LED indicators
FEATURES MIDI in/out, stereo in/out with mono option
DIMENSIONS 67 x 62 x 125mm
CONTACT face.be, walrusaudio.com

IN USE

There's a startling amount of functionality on offer here, far more than we could hope to cover even in a review twice this length. It's no exaggeration to say that we're confident the D1 is capable of just about any existing delay texture, as well as many that are yet to be discovered.

Dialling in full Edge-style dotted splendour takes only a moment with the digital voicing, while moving to vintage mode and setting the tweak switch to 'age' – which adds gentle warm overdrive and high-frequency roll-off to repeats – makes finding expressive soundscapes like those of John Martyn laughably simple.

The most valuable trait comes when you combine the tweak and attack knobs, which together open up new sonic spectra. Imagine a crystal-clear digital delay with added warmth and grit, and a smoothed-off attack so that each echo blooms gracefully in a wash of miniature swells. Or how about a deep modulated reverse delay subtly underpinning your acoustic guitar, with the mix knob giving your attack all the clarity and bite it could need – with trails? These are just some of the examples of the quality sounds we were able to pull from the D1.

As a bonus, the pedal has stereo ins and outs, so keyboard and synth players can join the fun. There's no shortage of overachieving delay pedals on the market. But the Walrus Audio D1 could soon replace many of them in the top-left corner of pedalboards around the world. It's superb.

10/10 **An unapologetically excellent delay unit for the player who demands the best**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Chase Bliss Thermae £499, Eventide Rose £349, Strymon TimeLine £399

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

TC ELECTRONIC
FLASHBACK 2 & HALL OF FAME 2 MINI

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

If you thought TC's TonePrint tech for loading new sounds via your guitar was ingenious, prepare to be blown away by the twist in its latest delay and reverb…

How small is too small? For decades now, technological progress and consumer demand has driven the desire for increasingly compact products. But what happens when you reach optimum size? Do you keep reducing it until your gadget is so diminutive it can only be operated by trained cockroaches? No. Size matters – but smarts matter more.

TC Electronic has clearly reached this point with its most bijou delay and reverb pedals. There'd be no sense in shrinking the Flashback Mini and Hall Of Fame Mini even more, lest they become practically unstompable. Instead, TC looked for a way to pack more functionality into the same already condensed space – and found its answer in the humble footswitch.

The Flashback 2 Mini and Hall Of Fame 2 Mini look much like their predecessors, and use the same TonePrint tech for installing new sounds through your guitar's pickups. What's new here is the Mash function, which turns each unit's bypass footswitch into a sort of secret expression pedal.

Look closely and you'll see the clue: the 1mm-thick rubber ring around the neck of each switch. It's just about enough to offer resistance when you stomp but, if you press down harder instead of lifting off as you would with a regular on/off switch, you'll unlock the pedals' hidden potential. Now, you might be thinking that an expression pedal with only a millimetre's travel won't be much fun to use. Frankly, so are we – but this is an intriguing prospect. We'll find out how well it works soon enough.

Little wonders: small units with big potential

Rubber stomp: a stealthy 1mm-thick rubber ring is key to the new Mash function

But before we quite literally press on, let's step back to see the picture as a whole, because, even if you don't make use of the Mash feature, there's still a whole lot of delay and reverb artfulness going on here.

The basics are as they were before: these are three-knob boxes that are still perfect for those who don't want to explore beyond the usual parameters. Each comes loaded with a standard sound of its type, but to stick with that would be like tucking in to a luxury breakfast buffet and eating only the muesli. Satisfying, perhaps, but there's much more on offer here.

There are currently dozens of delay and reverb sounds in the TonePrint arsenal, some of them designed by well-known players, others by TC's own tweakers, and most of them are available for these pedals.

The TonePrint smartphone app will take you through the process of loading a new sound by blasting its sound-encoded data into a pickup; it's slightly bonkers but supremely simple, and you can audition sounds quickly and without faff.

If you happen to have a USB Mini-B cable to hand (yes, the old kind – no, you don't get one in the box), you can load up the PC/Mac version of the app instead and hear each sound as soon as you click its name. Better still, you can edit sounds, and the degree of tone-sculpting power available here is virtually limitless. With both pedals, you can spend hours adjusting the tonal quality of the decay, the character of the modulation, the amount of octave-up shimmer and much more.

In another nifty touch, up to three variables can be assigned to the Mash function at once. So, for example, pushing down on the Flashback 2 Mini's footswitch could make the feedback run into self-oscillation, while the vibrato gets faster and the bass roll-off becomes more pronounced. And, because there's no such thing as too much control, you can map those response curves manually on a colour-coded graph.

IN USE

The fact that you can change just about everything in these pedals presents a novel challenge for the reviewer. You want to know what they sound like? It depends what you make them sound like.

Let's start with the factory settings. Solid stuff in both cases, with plenty of creative potential and no complaints about sound quality or background noise. If you want a workhorse digital delay and/or reverb with a pedalboard-friendly footprint, these will set you right.

As for the TonePrints, if anything there are too many. You'll never be short of options, sure, but how many flavours of slapback delay and cathedral reverb does anyone really need? The Flashback's murky tape echoes are good, and the ability to add chorus, vibrato or even flange to the repeats makes this well suited to texture fans.

Fall into decay: the units feature no shortage of sounds and variations

The Hall Of Fame excels at those shimmer effects, with plenty of variations for those who prefer their ethereal shrieks on the subtle side.

There are a few things to flag up though. You can only edit the TC templates, not the artist sounds, and the editing option is only available when connected via USB. And, at time of writing, the Android version of the app has not yet been updated to work with these new models.

All of which brings us to the Mash thing. There's a whiff of over-engineering about this and a lot of people will surely never find a use for it. But we have to say that, on balance, it's an unexpected winner.

What TC has done here is combine two existing ideas – Apple's Force Touch pressure-sensitive phone screens and EarthQuaker Devices' Flexi-Switch latching/non-latching footswitches – to create a gig-friendly shortcut to controlled chaos. Like the aptly-named Havoc switch on the Caroline Kilobyte delay, which sends that pedal into maximum feedback for as long as you hold it down, Mash lets you flip seamlessly between normal and extreme versions of your chosen setting.

It can be a little tricky to control, true, especially for those of us who favour a soft-soled slipper in the studio, but it is satisfying to hear the Flashback's repeats swell ever more insistently as you hold down on it.

Would a simple switch with Leslie-style ramping between two fixed settings have been just as effective in most situations? Probably. It would've been easier to use, too. But let's not stand in the way of progress.

Port of call: preview and edit sounds by connecting to your PC or Mac

KEY FEATURES

FLASHBACK 2 MINI
PRICE £95
DESCRIPTION Digital delay pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Delay time, feedback, level, bypass footswitch with Mash function
FEATURES Switchable true/buffered bypass; TonePrint loading via guitar pickup or USB; powered by 9V mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 93 x 53 x 50mm

9/10 **Just when you thought TC's mini-delay couldn't get any cleverer...**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Mooer D7 £100, Electro-Harmonix Canyon £132, Boss DD-8 £140

KEY FEATURES

HALL OF FAME 2 MINI
PRICE £95
DESCRIPTION Digital reverb pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Decay time, tone, level, bypass footswitch with Mash function
FEATURES Switchable true/buffered bypass; TonePrint loading via guitar pickup or USB; powered by 9V mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 93 x 53 x 50mm
CONTACT tcelectronic.com

9/10 **A tiny reverb capable of creating truly massive sounds**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Mooer R7 £100, Electro-Harmonix Oceans Eleven £122, Boss RV-6 £113

18+

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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Plasma Coil has a switchable latching/momentary footswitch for precise sonic chaos

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £339
DESCRIPTION Analogue distortion/fuzz/octave pedal, made in Latvia
CONTROLS Voltage, low frequency, 6-position special effect switch, high frequency, volume. True-bypass on/off footswitch, special effect footswitch, momentary/latching selector switch
POWER 300mA, 9V DC only
DIMENSIONS 148 x 96 x 70mm
CONTACT gamechangeraudio.com

GAMECHANGER AUDIO

THIRD MAN RECORDS PLASMA COIL

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

How do you make something that's achingly cool even cooler? Throw rock's most famous upholsterer and some crazy octave-fuzz fireworks into the mix, of course…

Gamechanger Audio's Plasma was already one of the most characterful noisemakers around, then midway through 2019 came its successor, developed in collaboration with Jack White's Third Man Records and featured on the most recent Raconteurs long-player *Help Us Stranger*.

The Plasma Coil takes the innovative operating principle of the original Plasma – namely converting your instrument's signal into a series of high-voltage plasma discharges in a xenon-filled tube – but dispenses with the blend control and adds a second footswitch to the recipe for so-called 'special effects'.

With a choice of latching and momentary settings, this additional switch engages one of six highly combustible varieties of hot sauce: volume boost, two subharmonic voices, an upper-harmonic mode and two offerings with upper and lower harmonics combined. Powerful EQ controls boost or cut low and high frequencies and the voltage knob regulates how much electrical current is sent to the plasma tube.

IN USE

Although we question the veracity of Gamechanger's claim that this pedal "literally strips paint off the wall", there's no doubt that the TMR Plasma Coil spits and snarls with absolute abandon. From aggressively gated fuzz to synth-like sub-octaves and glitchy chaos, there's an album's worth of killer riffs in your first 10 minutes with this thing. Forget the science behind it – this pedal instantly makes you want to form a band.

Whether you use the special effect switch in latching mode to flip between rhythm and lead, or in momentary mode to throw in devastating octave bursts, inspiration is never far away. It's not cheap, but if this is what the future of artist collaborations looks like, we're firmly onboard.

9/10 **Style and substance collide with deliciously addictive results**

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THE RUNDOWN

PRACTICE AMPS

WORDS TERENCE STANLEY

In this age of smartphone rigs and pedal-sized solutions, there's still a place for the humble practice amp for plug-and-play satisfaction. Here are the most diverse options in 2020…

YAMAHA THR10 II WIRELESS
£359

1 When it comes to all-inclusive practice amplifiers, few trump Yamaha's THR. This newly updated 20-watt version offers 15 guitar amp models, three bass amp models and three mic models for your acoustic, plus a bevy of effects, and Bluetooth connectivity. The real killer, however, is that, when paired with a Line 6 Relay G10T, you can throw the cables away and use the amp in full wireless mode.

BLACKSTAR FLY 3 BLUETOOTH
£95

2 Not only the most affordable amp on our list, but the best-sounding micro-amp on the market today. Even with its tiny three-inch speaker, the Fly 3 still does a remarkable job of filling the room with quality sounds. It also has Bluetooth for jamming along with your favourite tracks, and a headphone out for silent practice. But, to really make your jaw drop, turn up the volume and play with the in-built delay chiming around some sumptuous picked clean chords.

FENDER MUSTANG GT 40
£179

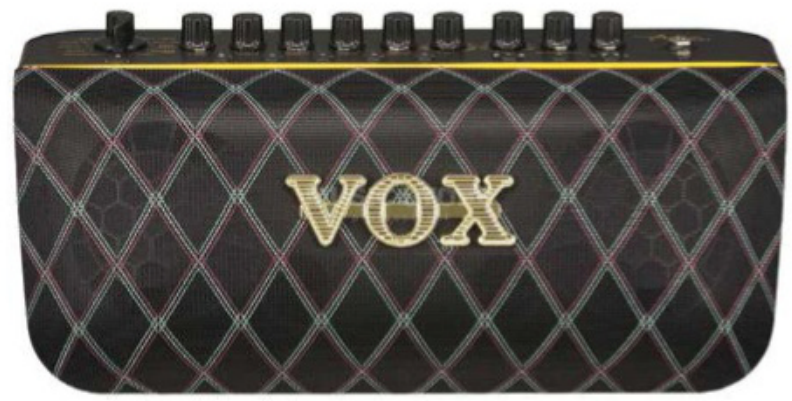
3 Looking for something with a little more punch? The GT 40 is a digital modelling amp that pumps 40 watts out of a pair of 6.5-inch drivers. It comes packaged with 21 amp models, including all your Fender favourites, and has wifi connectivity for updates. The Fender Tone smartphone app lets you get deep into amp-editing.

BOSS KATANA-AIR
£330

4 It's not enough to call yourself "the world's first totally wireless guitar amplifier". You need the substance to back it up. Boss's Katana-Air packs 30 watts of output, five amp models and more than 50 Boss effects into a compact format no bigger than a guitar-tech's toolbox. A fully charged Katana-Air should last 12 hours but, additionally, eight AA batteries will provide 20-watts of output for seven hours.

ORANGE CRUSH 20
£119

5 The Crush 20 is perfect for bedroom distortion-addicts, thanks to its high-gain preamp design. The amp features four stages of gain, and can churn out everything from chiming clean tones and classic blues crunch to full-bodied metal mayhem. The line-out uses Orange's CabSim feature to offer a faithful trouser-flapping emulation of a mic'd up Orange 4×12, through headphones or for recording.



VOX ADIO AIR GT
£229

6 It may be a 50-watt amp, but the Adio Air GT is still effortlessly portable. Its slant-bodied chassis houses two three-inch speakers and a bass-reflex structure that delivers a stereo sound density far exceeding the unit's size. You get 11 amp models onboard – a high-performance DSP and Vox's Virtual Element Technology recreates the output sound of the selected amp, right down to circuit components and design.

MARSHALL CODE25
£149

7 With its 100 pre-loaded and fully editable presets, it will take you a while to get bored of the Marshall Code25. The 25-watter comes with 14 Marshall-Softube (MST) preamps, four MST power amps and eight MST speaker cabinets, plus 25 onboard effects. Experiment with editing via the Marshall Gateway app; user-customised presets can be uploaded to the global library using the MyMarshall cloud service, for storage and easy retrieval.

ROLAND MICRO CUBE GX
£109

8 Roland's Micro Cube GX may look like the old battery-powered amps of yesteryear but it's much more than that. It uses Roland's composite-object sound-modelling technology to reproduce the sonic imprints of classic amps. Through Roland's i-Cube Link interface, users can play along with tracks and send studio-quality tones with effects straight into their recording app of choice.

Curt Malouin surrounded by his creations in Red Panda's Detroit HQ

INDUSTRY INSIDER

RED PANDA

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Red Panda makes intelligent pedals that can manipulate signals in complex ways, allowing for almost endless musical experimentation. We spoke to owner and engineer Curt Malouin about leaving synthesisers behind to focus on his Detroit-based boutique brand…

How did you get into guitar?

"I was interested in computers, electronics and music from an early age. I have no musical talent but I'm an engineer and enjoy designing tools for shaping and modifying sound. The guitar is an expressive and dynamic instrument. Growing up, I listened to a lot of Prince, Eddie Hazel [of Parliament-Funkadelic], Jimi Hendrix, Frank Zappa, and Pete Cosey [who played with Miles Davis]."

When did you first start building or tinkering with effects pedals?

"I built some guitar pedals for friends in college in the early 1990s but mostly designed software synthesizers until 2009. I was working on a large modular software synth but got tired of sitting in front of a computer for 12 hours a day and missed working on hardware. Red Panda started when a friend sent me a YouTube video of an organ going through an old guitar pedal.

"There is a simplicity and immediacy to pedals that allows you to get creative while still focusing on your playing. You can combine pedals to extend your instrument in unique ways, similar to a modular synth with your guitar as the oscillator. At the same time, you have constraints, in terms of pedalboard space and your ability to manipulate the knobs while playing. That forces you to make some decisions up front, which lets you concentrate on playing."

What was the moment you realised that you had a viable business?

"When Juan Alderete included the Particle pedal in his top 10 pedals of 2013. I had a plan for Red Panda but at the time I was too busy drilling and soldering to pay attention to long-term business decisions. It was both humbling and motivating that Juan found the Particle, took the time to learn it, and then showed other musicians how he used it on his blog [*Pedals & Effects*]."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"In 2016, we worked with a graphic designer to update the look of our pedals and improve consistency between products. Our mixer and the updated Particle V1 (with no panda-head image) were the first results. My co-worker Sylvie [Demers] took over from there and I think she nailed it with the Tensor in 2017. It uses our new, smaller enclosure and balances a modern, clean look with interesting graphics."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"I designed the Particle in 2010/2011. The idea was to implement real-time granular synthesis in a way that encouraged interactive sound design, while allowing you to focus on your playing. Granular synthesis was somewhat academic and almost always done on computers at that time. The Particle is based around the familiar concept of a delay line – hence the term 'granular delay' – and organises different granular effects into eight modes.

"I prototyped a granular delay on different DSP chips and found that the tricks I needed to use on the Spin FV-1 led

to some interesting sounds. I worked on it for two years, figuring out how to trick the FV-1 into doing things such as reverse delay and granular playback."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"Every time I hear one of our products on a record or at a concert I'm proud that we could play a small part."

Did you have any outside investors or other external help to get your business off the ground?

"No, we've always been self-funded. I worked for 17 years in software-engineering jobs, started Red Panda in my spare time and let it grow naturally. Later, we did get a grant that covered 20 per cent of the cost of the UV-LED printer that we use to print graphics on our pedals, which we appreciated greatly, but we were already established by that point."

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the guitar industry in 2020?

"Tariffs and general trade uncertainty mean that I spend a lot of time working with suppliers and hunting down sources for parts to keep our costs in check. But it's a great time to be a small manufacturer because the cost of automation has come down and that allows us to assemble products with the same quality and reliability as a large factory."

What's next for Red Panda?

"We are shipping version two of our Context reverb pedal this spring. Then, in early summer, we will be updating our Raster delay and Bitmap bitcrusher pedals so that they use our new enclosure, stereo in/out, USB MIDI, and soft-touch switches."

For more, visit www.redpandalab.com

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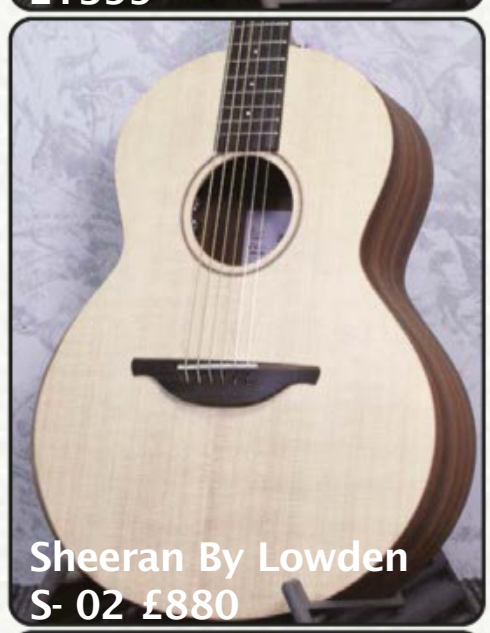
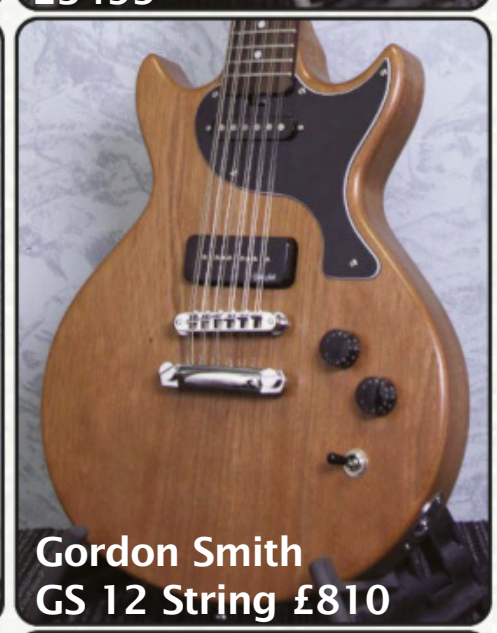
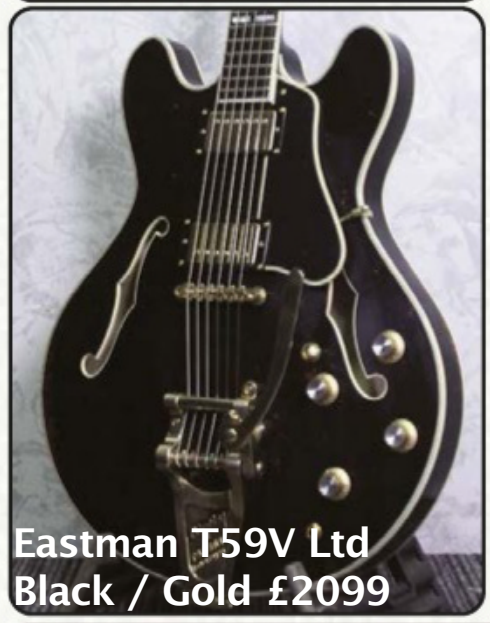

Sheeran By Lowden
S- 02 £880


Gordon Smith
GS 12 String £810


Eastman T59V Ltd
Black / Gold £2099

Fender Japan Daybreak
Telecaster £949

ACOUSTICS
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SHOP TALK

PHIL JAMISON MATCHLESS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

Don't talk to Phil Jamison about the supposed magical eras of Matchless amplifiers, thank you very much. They've all been great – and there's evidence the California maker is building them better than ever

Plenty of small-shop amplifier manufacturers have laid claim to having kickstarted the 'boutique' phenomenon. Few guitarists who swim in those waters would disagree, however, that Matchless was the biggest fish of the 1990s and 2000s boutique revival, and still represents the epitome of construction quality and endurance, not to mention ungodly tones.

Much has been made of Mark Sampson's role with Matchless, from co-founding the company in 1989 and his contributions to design, to the firm's eventual decline and bankruptcy about 10 years later. But if there's a steady hand we can credit with reinvigorating the flagging company and guiding the brand back to its rightful place atop the hand-wired heap, it's that of Matchless' chief operating officer and 21st-century visionary Phil Jamison.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

Jamison was born and raised in Spring, Texas, which he recalls was "a great place to grow up". He came to the guitar early and, long before he would discover his apparently innate knack for fixing up valve amps, he intended to forge a career with the instrument when the time came to leave the nest.

"I started playing guitar when I was nine," he says. "I taught myself. I took my stepdad's nylon guitar, which was made by Gibson, as well as a Bob Seger songbook and a Bob Seger record, and just followed the pictures – and voila. I moved from Texas when I was 18, directly out of high school, and went to Hollywood and enrolled in the Musician's Institute. I did the GIT [Guitar Institute of Technology] programme and have been in California ever since."

The GIT was advertised in the back pages of prominent US guitar magazines in the 1980s – via 'class' photos that showed off the stars you'd purportedly be rubbing elbows with and, so it was implied, receive instruction from – and was many a young hopeful's embodiment of the California dream. Although it set Jamison on the trajectory that has landed him where he is today, the reality was not quite so shiny as the glossy spreads themselves.

“I TOOK MY STEPDAD’S NYLON GUITAR, WHICH WAS MADE BY GIBSON, AS WELL AS A BOB SEGER SONGBOOK AND A BOB SEGER RECORD, AND JUST FOLLOWED THE PICTURES – AND VOILA”

ABOVE Matchless’s new Laurel Canyon models recreate the sound of Southern California in the late 1960s

FACING PAGE Tooled up: Matchless standard-bearer Phil Jamison hard at work

“The way the ads and the catalogue were, it made it seem like these huge A-list people were always there, hanging out,” says Jamison. “But if and when they even went there it would be, like, *one* time.”

After attending the Musician’s Institute, Jamison took a job with a cartage company, hauling gear for players on the LA scene. From there, he segued into a job in 1991 with amp company VHT, then owned by Steven Fryette. Prior to that gig, Jamison’s experience with tube amps was limited to working on his own gear. His stint with Fryette provided a hi-voltage springboard into the formalities of the amp industry.

“Stevie is a brilliant guy,” says Jamison. “A fantastic engineer and guitarist. He taught me a lot. Their method of building was radically different from Matchless, which was fine. But there was still plenty of wiring in there so I was able to learn to do all of that. It was an easy transition when I went to Matchless. They immediately sat me at a table and put me on wiring.”

A MATCHLESS OPPORTUNITY

Jamison started with Matchless in late 1992 – just three years after the company was founded – and he worked his way up from the ground floor.

“I was doing all the QC,” he says. “I trained most of the line workers, taught them how to build amps. I built all of the prototypes. Amps such as the John Jorgenson, and the Chief, I had to build from scratch. Basically, with the Jorgenson, Mark Sampson walked in and said: ‘Hey, we want to build an amp for John. It’s got to have an EF86 circuit and it needs tremolo and reverb. Come and get me when you get stuck.’ And that was how that happened.

“I built the first four or five of those, and one of them was pretty cool. I had to cut the chassis to do it but it had two 15-watt output transformers outside and one 30-watt power transformer. I built two separate tremolo circuits so it had a dual tremolo thing going on. One output transformer went to two eight-inch speakers and the other went to a 12-inch. It had kind of an interesting sound to it. There’s only one in the world. I don’t know if John still has it but that was built specifically for him.”

As the late 1990s approached, however, Matchless hit several bumps in the road. Turbulence caused by rapid expansion and, apparently, the knock-on effect of the recession in Japan ate away at the business. Jamison was a victim of the first round of layoffs at the company in 1997. Matchless went bankrupt a year later. Meanwhile, Jamison worked within LA’s bustling boutique-amp scene – even consulting at TopHat for a time – until he got the opportunity to help the leading brand in genuine point-to-point manufacturing back on its feet.

“We reopened in August 2000,” says Jamison, “when I came in as chief operating officer. I’ve been running all the operations ever since.”

ABOVE Made in heaven: amp-building at the company's LA headquarters

"THERE ARE SO MANY FACTORS THAT PLAY INTO WHAT MAKES AN AMP SOUND GOOD; IT'S NOT JUST ONE THING. THERE'S NO MAGIC INGREDIENT"

GETTING TO THE POINT-TO-POINT

While guitarists recognise the Matchless brand for its construction quality and robust tone, solder junkies are more concerned with the painstaking wiring jobs inside these amplifiers' chassis.

Makers using any form of hand-wired circuitry will often promote their work as point to point. But that term is more accurately reserved for chassis in which components are connected from one stage in the signal chain to the next largely through the use of other components – a resistor's own leads connect the input jack to the first preamp valve socket, for example, and a coupling capacitor connects the output of that gain stage to the volume potentiometer, and so on.

Matchless amps have been made this way from the brand's very beginnings, and it's how they continue to be manufactured today, with just a short terminal strip here and there for component support, and no actual circuit board, as such.

"It's difficult to do only point-to-point," says Jamison. "It's expensive to do it that way. We see other brands out there that are not doing point-to-point and they're sort of trying to undercut what we're doing. Some customers don't necessarily understand why one thing is $4,000 and another is $1,000. It doesn't really register, the kind of quality they're getting.

"The most I see of it is some of the comments on the forums. Some people don't appreciate or understand what it takes to build something like this from scratch and all of the factors involved.

"There are so many factors that play into what makes an amp sound good; it's not just one thing. Just because you're doing a point-to-point amp doesn't mean it's going to sound better than something else. You need the right metals, with the right thickness, the right transformers and, often, the types of parts you use play a huge factor in the overall build. There's no magic ingredient."

TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

As Jamison attests, there may be no single component responsible for that lively, dynamic and expressive Matchless tone – which is to say that *every* component is critical in its own way – but he is able to point to one large part that constitutes the humming heart of the whole operation.

"The most important thing," says Jamison, "is the transformers. Our transformers are crazy expensive. I would say the cost of them is probably quadruple that of most other transformers. But there's a reason for it. The chassis, the actual metal, plays a big difference in the sound too. I've experimented a lot with thinner chassis, thicker chassis, aluminium chassis – all those things do play a huge factor in terms of sound and clarity.

"Then, you've got the specific parts that you're putting in, all of which make a big difference. The layout of that makes a massive difference too: you can actually have the circuit wired in such a way that it won't sound as good as it would have if you'd wired it another way, if you'd laid stuff out in a different area. I've found that I can lay parts in different directions and the field hum just immediately cancels out, like a phase relation."

Amp enthusiasts well versed in Matchless builds will happily tell you that the company's units are as good as they've ever been. The company employs the same methods and uses components that are

the same, or as close to the originals as are currently available, as it always has. But Jamison has used his 20-year tenure with the reinvigorated manufacturer to actually *improve* upon its output.

Among other things, his reimagining of the C30 circuit layout – the configuration in the company's flagship DC 2x12 combo, SC30 1x12 combo, and HC30 head, and still its all-time bestseller – has yielded an amp that is notably quieter than those that came before but retains every ounce of the bite, harmonic sparkle and touch sensitivity that made the model famous in1989.

"With completely revamping the C30 chassis," says Jamison, "I'm able to do much more stuff. I can do tremolo and reverb, and multiple channels. I've also changed the effects loop on those things. There used to be one TRS jack [per channel] but by revamping the entire rear control panel, I did a separate quarter-inch send and return for each channel, and people seem to like that lot more than having to find a stereo-Y cord to use the loop."

Without getting into the semantic quagmire that so many sellers of older, used Matchless amps employ to give their listings a boost, the continual push by Jamison to make great designs better puts paid to that whole 'Sampson-era' tag that re-sellers like to hang from Matchless creations from the 1990s.

MADE FOR THE STAGE

Other than the gripes about price from players who might not appreciate the work that goes into this gear – and the results that said work delivers – guitar-amp chatrooms on the web will occasionally cough up threads featuring users who find Matchless amps too 'hard' or 'punchy' sounding or just 'too damn loud'. Most of the time, however, these are misfires of application, rather than bad performances from the amps themselves.

Which is to say that guitarists who purchase these units solely for use in their garages, bedrooms and basements, much of the time, just don't get it.

"There are definitely high-end pros, the working people that I deal with, that certainly get it – completely," says Jamison. "There's never even a flinch or any hesitation on anything. They totally understand the product they're getting and how it will impact their sound. Whether it's the touch response or how it cuts through, where it sits in the mix when they're playing in a live situation or in the studio. All those factors, all those little tiny nuances – they hear it and they recognise it.

"It's important for amps to project. There are times when you'll hear an amp by itself in a room and it will sound great but then you'll get it into a larger room or put it with a band or whatever and you'll realise that the amp only really projects two or three feet, and after that it just falls apart and becomes muddy. That projection is a hard thing to achieve.

ABOVE Game, set, Matchless: there aren't many better stage rigs than a C30 Reverb head and a 2x12 cabinet

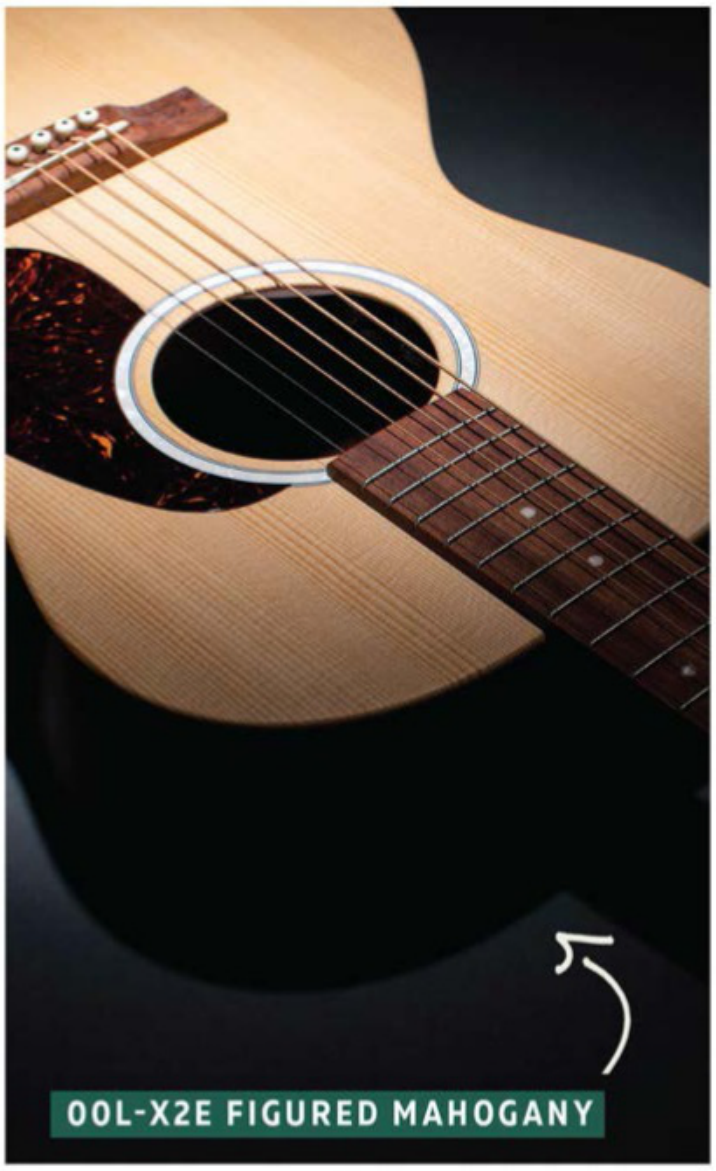
"If you're using one of our amps in an effort to get the bedroom-rockstar thing going on, well, they're just not made for that. That's the thing about these amps: they are totally meant to be turned up. That's part of the magic and the sound and the ambience that they really kick off. These were meant for the stages and the studios, and to be played in that sweet spot, volume-wise."

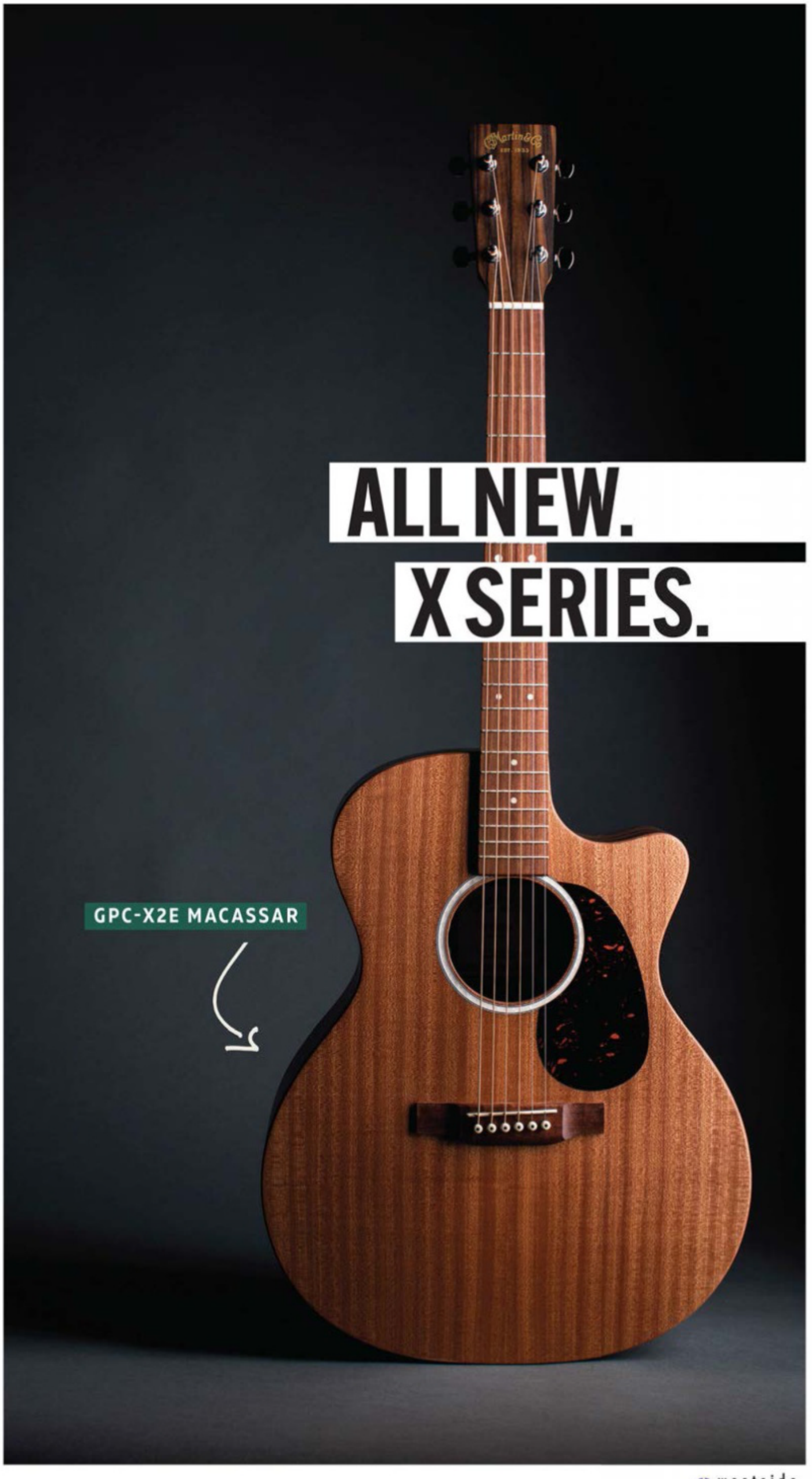
While early classics such as the DC30 and the 15-watt Lightning remain company flagships, several of Jamison's own designs from the latter era have won over fans too. The three-channel Independence, the DC30-meets-EL34 Phoenix, and the Avalon – one of Jamison's favourite amps he's ever designed – have all seen the pre-eminent maker of point-to-point valve architecture innovating well into their third decade and beyond. But their boundary pushing work has not come to an end just yet. Rather than resting on their laurels, Matchless has a brand-new creation for which Jamison has high hopes: the Laurel Canyon.

"It's our very first 6V6 amp," he says. "I've done a 20-watt version with two 6V6 and I just built our first 40-watt with four of them. It's kind of a spin-off of what we're famous for but it's got a midrange control instead of it being fixed. I've changed quite a bit of the circuit for a specific sound I'm going for, kind of that crash-and-burn '66 thing. It nails the old Neil Young and Rolling Stones stuff. I was really going for the whole essence of the Laurel Canyon sound, of players back in the late 1960s and 1970s who were part of that [Southern California] scene.

"Right now it's one of my most favourite amps. I think it's just because it's something different. It's such a departure from that EL84 sound and it doesn't sound like [an EL34-based] Clubman or a Chieftain either. It's just got its own thing."

Onward and upward, then, with the Jamison era of a legendary boutique guitar-amp maker.





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DIY WORKSHOP

CULT CLASSIC RESTORATION PROJECT

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

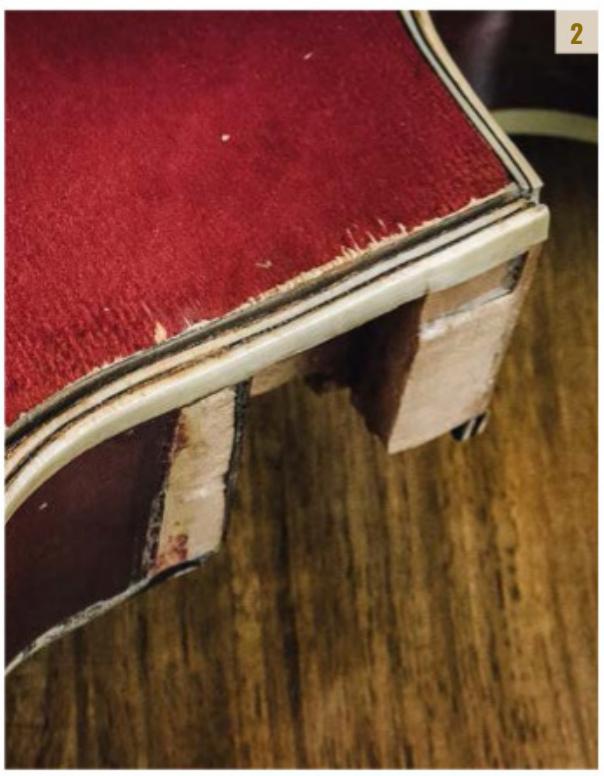
British-made Grimshaw guitars of the early 60s could hold their own with many of the USA-made instruments of the time, but this SS Deluxe model needs a little TLC…

1

1 The outer binding has separated from the body in three of the four waist areas and has to be softened with heat before it can be stretched back and glued

2 The lacquer and wood is chipped beneath the heel area and all of the binding, which appears to be heat-damaged, is detached

3 Dried glue will need to be cleaned out of the neck socket and powdery glue residue can be seen in the area where the binding is missing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3

Only dimly aware of the Grimshaw brand? Never heard of it at all? Well, although there's not a great deal of Grimshaw guitars info available online today, we've all heard one in action courtesy of Joe Moretti's spine-tingling guitar playing on *Shakin' All Over* by Johnny Kid & The Pirates back in 1960.

Pete Townshend would of course go on to cover the song many times with The Who, and his own Grimshaw SS Deluxe was a real favourite – albeit modified with a trio of Rickenbacker pickups and the Californian brand's headstock nameplate.

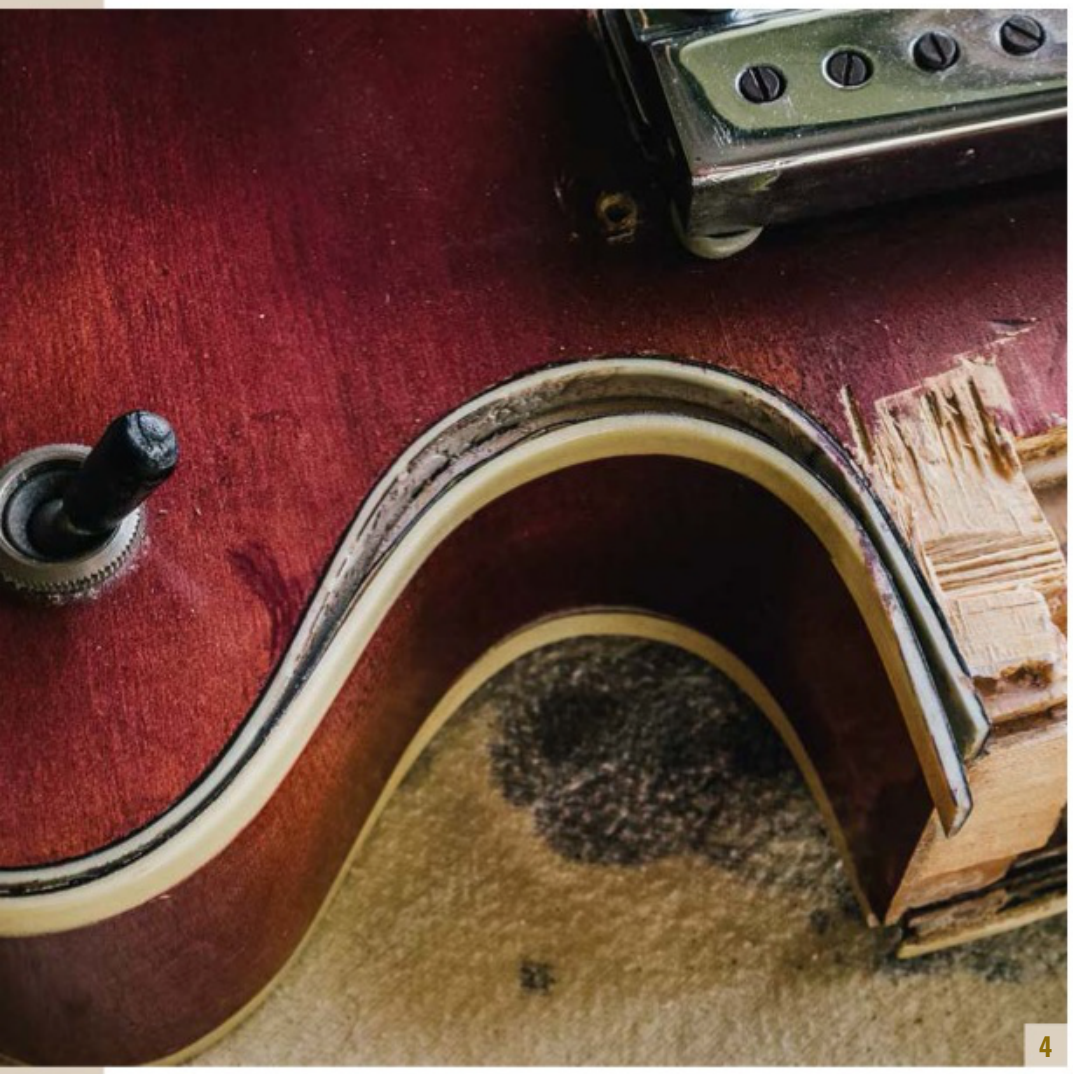
Founded in Lancashire over 5,000 miles away from the SoCal sunshine by Emile Grimshaws Snr and Jr, the company was established in 1930 to manufacture banjos, mandolins and guitars. By 1935, Grimshaw could even boast a Premiervox electric guitar in its catalogue, assembled in the UK largely from Rickenbacker parts. 30 years later, Townshend's Rickenbacker parts were likely salvaged from the carcasses of smashed instruments, rather than specially imported for the purpose.

Guitar production had been ramped up after Emile Sr died in 1943 and by the late 1950s, Grimshaw's most successful model was the aforementioned SS Deluxe. The 'SS' stands for short scale, and it was popular with many first-generation British rock 'n' rollers.

I must confess to being only very dimly aware of the Grimshaw story when my friend Jim Lewis gave me the instrument featured here, and my knowledge of the range was even more limited. Thanks then to Grimshawguitars.co.uk head honcho Eric Sandiford, who helpfully identified it as an early 1960s SS Deluxe. He describes it as a MkII version, due to its altered headstock shape and adjustable truss-rod.

Eric suggests a production date of 1962-1964, but it's hard to be exact because SS Deluxes weren't given serial numbers. The model came with either f-holes or the more desirable teardrops, and although the 1950s examples are most sought after, Eric says the electronics were superior on the later models. Inside the body of this guitar, a label features the address of Grimshaw's sales HQ between 1962 and 1975, on Great Pulteney St in London's Soho.

Later on, Grimshaw moved into solidbodies with the Les Paul-inspired GS30. Gibson apparently granted Grimshaw a license to manufacture a humbucking pickup based on Seth Lover's design and remarkably, a new GS30 would have cost you more at the time than a secondhand Burst. The company finally ceased trading in the mid 1980s and Emile Grimshaw Jr passed away in 1987.



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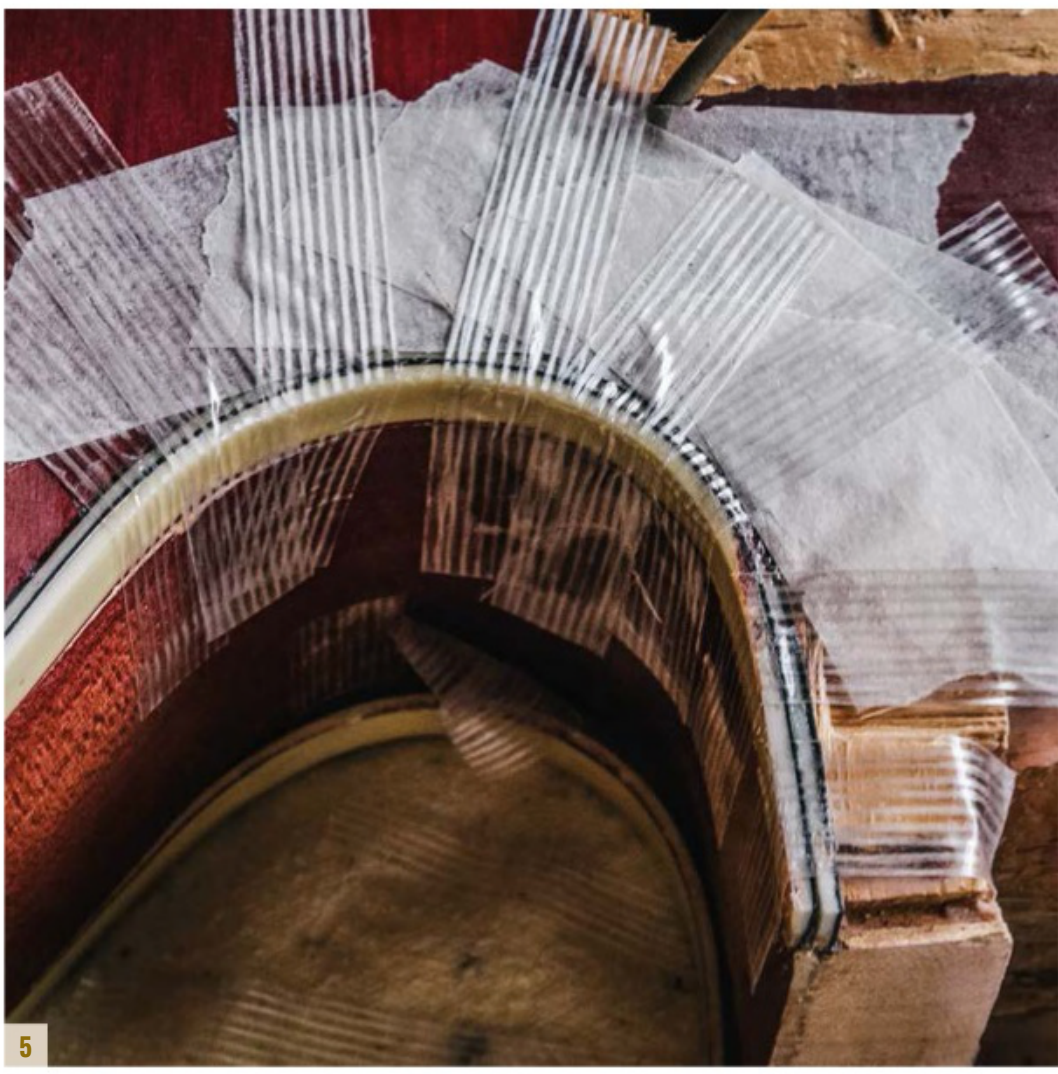

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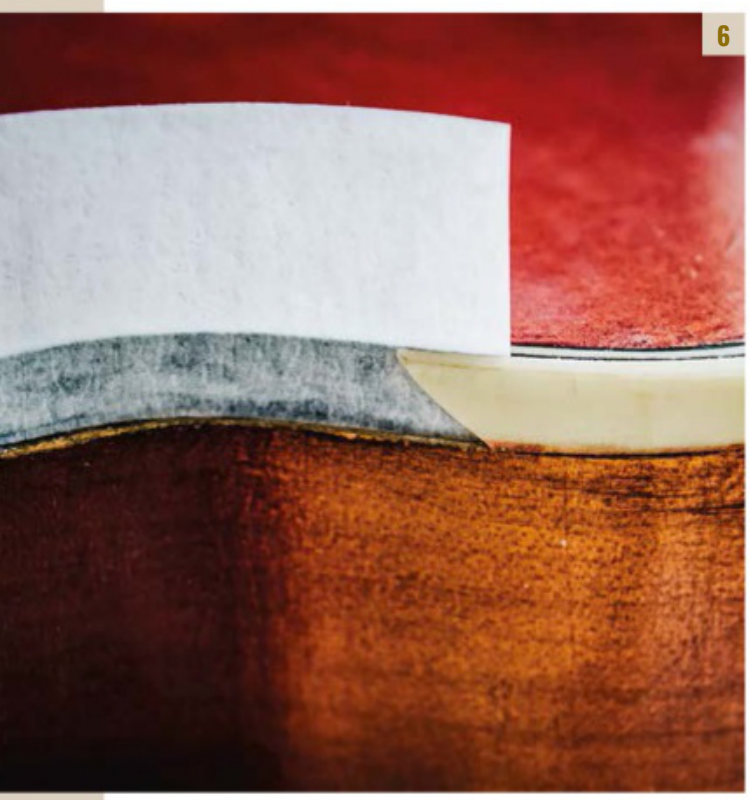

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7

4 The outer layer of binding has come loose all the way from the heel to beyond the horn of the cutaway

5 Masking tape is used to protect the finish from the superglue to make cleanup easier after the plastic binding tape is removed

6 Placing a length of masking tape behind the binding allows the cut angle to be marked and transferred onto the replacement binding for a snug fit

7 A fresh strip of binding is glued onto the end of the fretboard and taped in place

PROJECT PLANNING

Although a lot of affection remains for British- and European-made guitars from the pre-Beatles rock 'n' roll era, even the most diehard enthusiasts would probably acknowledge that Gibsons, Fenders and Gretsches were better instruments. That said, the closer I examine this guitar, the more impressive I find it. The build quality is easily on a par with Gretsch models of the time.

The offset body shape looks surprisingly contemporary in a West Coast boutique sort of way, and it's made from laminated wood that appears to be maple. The neck is certainly mahogany and the fretboard is high-quality quartersawn rosewood.

The body and headstock have multi-ply binding, with single ply binding for the fretboard and f-holes. The controls are reminiscent of some older Epiphone jazz models and the Van Ghent tuners still turn smoothly and feel solid. I love the faded cherry colour, too, although I suspect it may have been touched up in some areas over the years. The bridge is currently missing but the tailpiece remains, along with the stepped single-coil pickups.

As you've no doubt surmised from the photos, the main issue is that the body and neck have become separated. Judging by the splintered wood on the top of the body, and copious amounts of splintering around the heel, the separation may have involved some trauma.

An excess of glue in the heel block might indicate a previous attempt at repair. There's also a 'countersunk' screw hole that passes through the heel into the heel block – in the Gretsch style – but I can't say for sure if it was done that way in the factory. The rear binding is warped and buckled in that area, too, which may have been caused by a heat source.

A quick electronics check demonstrates that both pickups are working, but the controls will need some figuring out and a lot of contact cleaner. Besides that, I'm going to be doing a whole lot of binding repairs, and using techniques that may be applied to plenty of old guitars. Only one section is actually missing, but much of the binding is loose in the cutaways, and it has shrunk away from the body in the waist area. The heel cap has also vanished, and without it there will be a sizeable gap under the heel.

8

9

8 A file, a utility knife blade and abrasive paper are used to clean off the excess binding from the neck

9 The repair is complete, and once the new binding has been sprayed with tinted lacquer, it will blend in nicely

10

10 The neck's dovetail will need a lot of tidying up, – notice that the entry and exit holes for the Gretsch-style screw can be seen

11

11 Truss-rods were fitted to later SS Deluxes and this one is tested before the neck is glued back on

This won't be a painstaking and meticulous restoration. Instead, I'm focusing on addressing the cosmetic and structural issues, and getting this guitar playing again to find out how it sounds.

BINDING BLUES

I begin with the waist and cutaway areas, where shrinkage has left gaps between the binding and the body. This is a very common issue with old guitars and I'm pleased that the binding hasn't split. It feels quite taut and there's insufficient play for it to press back into position.

Rather than cut it and glue in a patch, I decide to heat the binding with a hairdryer. Plastic will soften if sufficient heat is applied, but care must be taken with the lacquer. I'll use a paint stripping heat gun when I'm binding Les Paul bodies and the like – but only if there's no finish on the guitar.

After a few minutes the binding starts to become malleable and I use a mallet handle to press it back into the waist. The handle is oval, which helps because I can twist it around to best match the curve in the area in which I'm working.

Once I'm confident the binding has stretched sufficiently, I apply gel superglue in the routed channel and hold the binding in place with strong binding tape. Masking tape usually works fine, too, but here I want something a bit stronger. The process is repeated for two other waist areas.

The problem extends over a wider area at the cutaway and it's complicated by the fact that the black and white layers are separating. Because I have an end piece to work from, I carefully unpick the binding from the body and separate it all the way to the horn.

The original glue has turned to powder and I use a craft knife to clean it off ready for some fresh glue. Fortunately, no heat is required this time, but the re-glued shrunken binding now stops a few millimetres short. Adding a small extra piece will fill the gap.

After reattaching the binding in the neck heel area, I get to the trickiest part. The missing section on the upper horn has to be replaced, so I have a rummage through my offcuts to find the best match. Whether the original binding snapped or was cut, I can't say, but it's a neat and clean angle. After cleaning off the powdery glue, I lay some masking tape in the channel, extending behind the point where I'll make the join.

12 The pickup unit has integral springs and is attached to a mounting plate that's screwed onto the body by two bolts, which also provide height adjustment

13 With resistors soldered onto the volume pots and some unusual connections, the SS Deluxe may benefit from some rewiring, but for now, a cleanup will do

14 The mounting plate has previously been moved around and now has to be repositioned to get it back onto the centre line after the neck reset

Using a very fine pencil, I mark the binding line, remove the tape and place it over the piece of binding I've selected for the patch. This gives me the angle I need to cut the new binding to butt it up against the old. A bit of finessing with a craft knife and abrasive paper is needed, then I apply the hairdryer treatment to pre-bend the binding patch before sticking it on.

This time, because there are gaps to fill, too, I use a paste made by dissolving pieces of binding in acetone. Finally, I add a strip of binding to the end of the fretboard to replace the missing piece. Grimshaw used butt joints rather than mitres, so I do the same.

BLENDING IN

The binding repairs are done, but now I have to scrape and sand off the excess binding and glue. For this I use a utility knife blade as a scraper and follow up with ever decreasing grades of abrasive paper and Micro-Mesh. Eventually everything feels smooth, but the repaired areas are clear to see because the yellowed lacquer no longer covers them.

To blend everything in, I use a very cheap Humbrol airbrush. They're designed for model-making and cost less than £20. A can of aerosol propellant costs about £10 and the airbrush is ideal for small touch ups. I mix nitrocellulose lacquer 50/50 with thinners in the airbrush's glass bottle, add one drop of Stewart-MacDonald Vintage Amber tint and the colour match looks pretty good. The spray is so fine, I don't even need to mask off the body or cut and polish to blend in the repair.

NECK SET

I have no idea what glue Grimshaw used, but it's white and opaque in appearance, and there's plenty of it in the neck pocket. There are several layers of rosewood veneer glued to one side of the pocket and they're still solidly attached. I need to get back to the wood to reset the neck, so I peel off the outer layer of rosewood veneer using a sharp chisel and then clean both sides of the pocket with a rasp.

I tidy up the neck's dovetail the same way and once I have four clean gluing surfaces, I test fit the neck. It's important to achieve the correct back angle and get the neck square with the body's centre line. To check alignment, I press the neck into the joint, hold it tight with a clamp and put two strings in the outer positions.

Everything looks pretty good, but I decide to glue two layers of veneer onto the bass side of the neck pocket and a single layer on the treble side. Once the glue has set, the neck will no longer slot into the pocket – which is exactly what I wanted.

15

16

15 Grimshaw changed the headstock shape for later SS Deluxes and Emile Grimshaw Jr supposedly painted all the logos himself

16 The Van Ghent tuners are smooth, solid and work far better today than a similarly neglected set of vintage Klusons would

17 These massive plastic control knobs should be easy to spot on a dark stage!

18 The fretboard is high-quality, quartersawn rosewood and the block inlays are real pearl

19 Post-restoration, the vital signs are good. Once it's had a proper set-up, this Grimshaw will be a gem!

17

18

Neck setting begins with applying chalk to the sides of the pocket and trying to insert the neck. It goes in about 1cm, then I extract it and examine the chalk marks that have transferred onto the dovetail. I shave away a tiny amount of wood where I see the chalk marks and place the neck back in the socket. It goes a little deeper, before I have to remove it, shave a bit more wood off the dovetail and try again.

Each time it presses a bit further into the slot and after about 20 minutes, the neck presses all the way in and the joint is so tight I have to tap the neck out with a rubber mallet. After a final check with the strings lightly tensioned, I clean off all the chalk residue, apply some Titebond Original glue and leave the neck clamped overnight. [To read more in-depth accounts of this process check out Huw's Gretsch Anniversary conversion and Martin kit build articles on *Guitar.com* – Ed]

TEST RUN

Pulling a tune-o-matic on a rosewood base from my parts bin, the Grimshaw is strung up with a set of 0.010s and tuned to pitch. Everything feels stable and solid, and I finally get to hear what an SS Deluxe sounds like. It's loud, very balanced and resonant, and has surprising sustain.

A peek through the control cavity reveals why – there's a solid spruce plank running through the centre of the body. It's not quite an ES-335 style centre-block, and it's only fitted to the top, but the effect is very similar and the unplugged tone is a mashup of ES-335, ES-295 and trestle-braced Gretsch.

The temporary bridge's string-spacing is a little narrow, so the strings don't quite line up with the tiny pole screws in the pickups – even after I've re-positioned the bridge pickup. Consequently, I can't be confident that I'm hearing them at their best. The tone definitely has a retro twang at the bridge and a woody jazziness at the neck, but while they sound clear, they're not especially powerful or bright.

The owner is confident about relocating the original heel cap and bridge, and a proper setup will be done once he has. It already plays so nicely and sounds so good, going the extra mile will certainly be worth it – it has the potential to be pretty special. Grimshaw guitars are often overlooked on the vintage scene, but if you do find one, don't pass up the chance to try it out.

19

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AMPLIFIER FAQ

This month, Rift's head honcho Chris Fantana tackles the potentially explosive issue of international mains voltage variances...

Have a burning question about your amp, or worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

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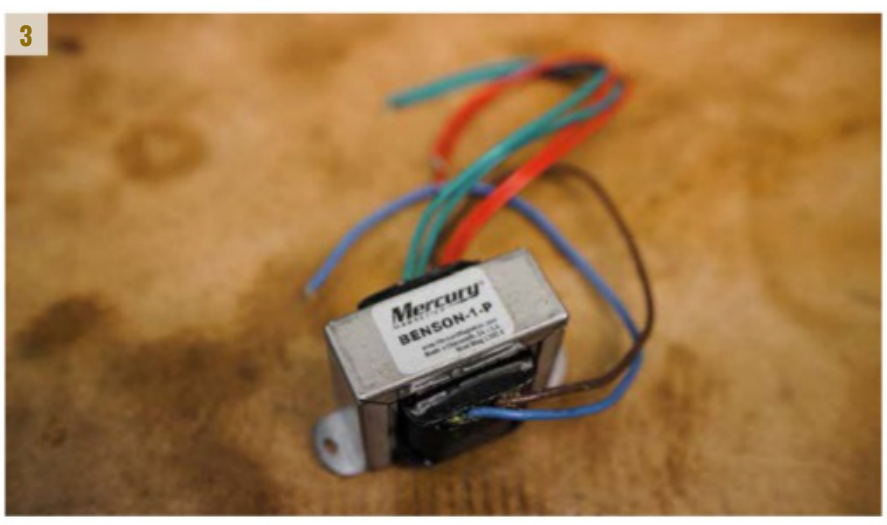


3

1 This US-made Benson Vinny is going to get converted to run on 240v UK mains power

2 The Benson's mains transformer doesn't have a 240v tap, so a replacement is going to be needed

3 Benson kindly supplied us with a 240v transformer made by Mercury Magnetics

Hi Chris, I'm looking at importing an amplifier from the USA, what will I need to run it on a UK 240v mains supply?
ROBERT, CARDIFF

Thanks for getting in touch, Robert! Depending on what the amplifier is, your options can be varied or limited. On some amplifiers you might get away with just a wire swap inside the chassis, on others, major surgery might be required.

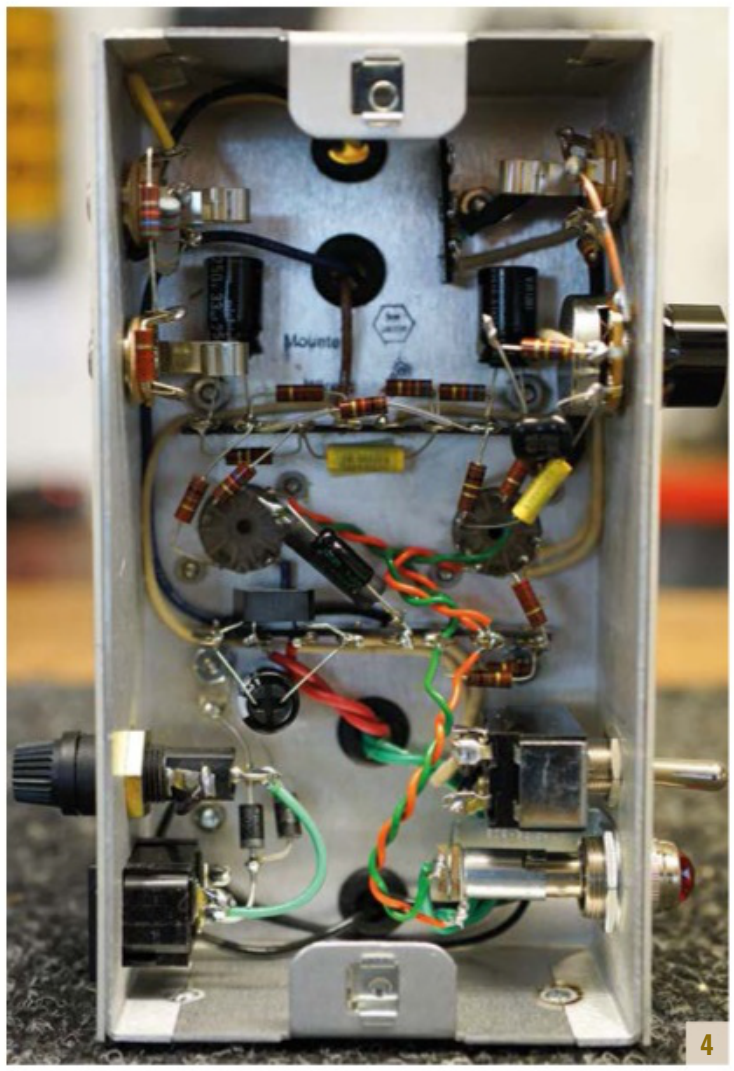
Your timing couldn't be better though… I have a Benson Vinny amplifier here in the workshop that the customer wants converting to work with our mains supply. He purchased it whilst out in the States and as it's so small, he brought it back as hand luggage!

Unfortunately, it's wired for 120v mains so cannot be plugged into our wall sockets without modification. A quick look inside shows that the mains transformer does not have a 240v tap, so a replacement must be sought and then swapped into the chassis. After reaching out to Benson, the company kindly supplied a 240v version of the unit made by transformer winding giant, Mercury Magnetics.

The first step is to remove the chassis from the cabinet, which in this case is held in by two machine screws on the underside. The chassis slides out with relative ease and we can now get a good look at the architecture and circuit topology.

I can see the six wires coming from the existing transformer, through a rubber grommet and into the chassis itself. Two of these are black, two are green, and the final two are red. Experience tells me that the red pair is the high voltage winding, the greens are our heater supply, and therefore the blacks must be our primary winding. I compare that to the replacement unit and can see that all the wire colours match up, except the primary side which now has a blue and brown pair, matching the homologated colours of our UK live and neutral mains wiring.

Before I can start working inside the chassis, I must discharge the hi-voltage electrolytic capacitors that store a lethal charge. I have a home-made discharge cable made up of a single 100k 2W resistor with crocodile clips attached at either end. By connecting one end to ground and the other to any point along



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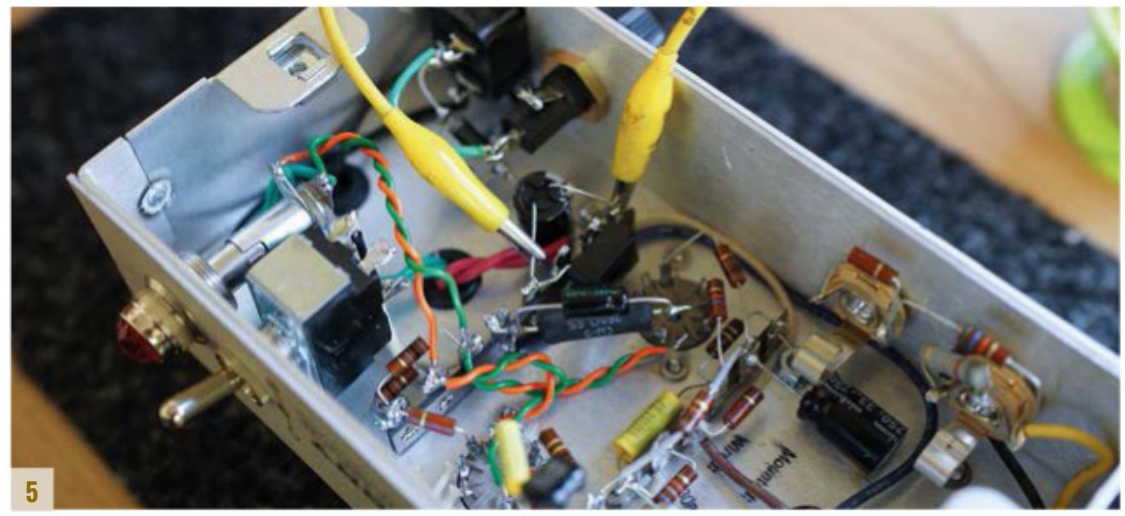

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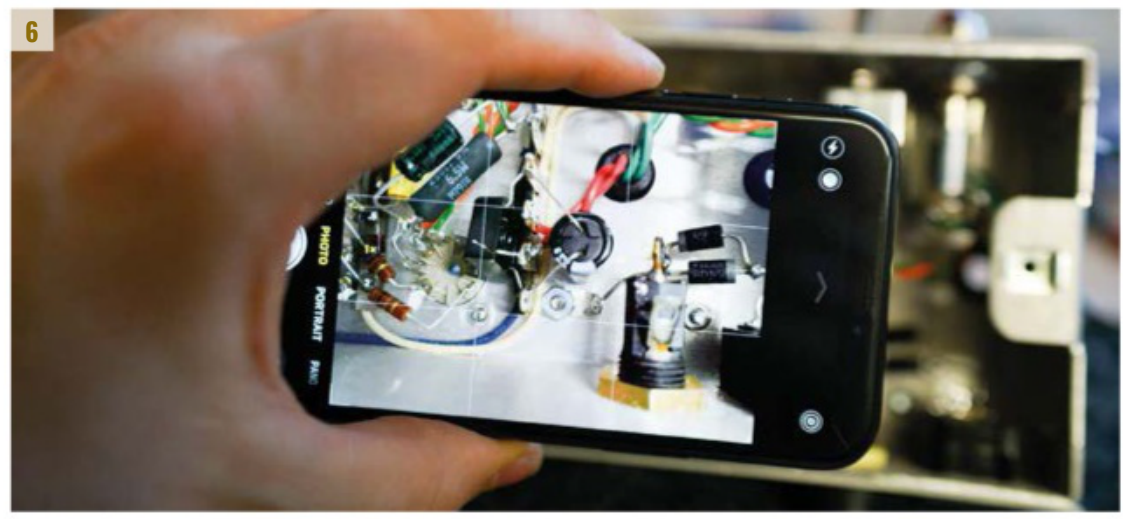

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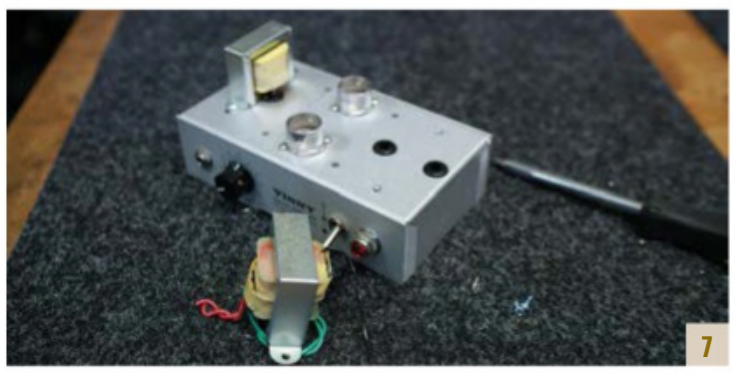

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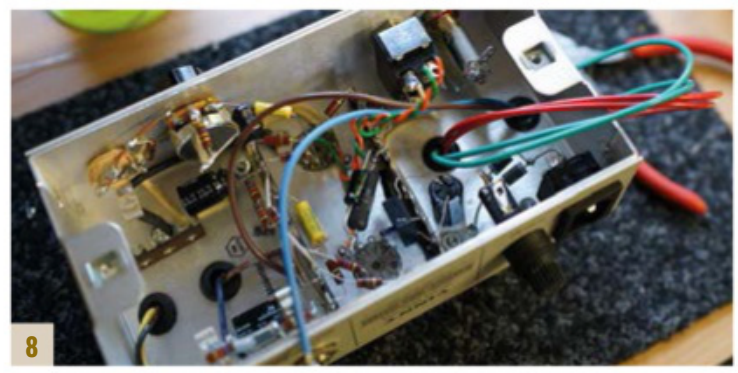

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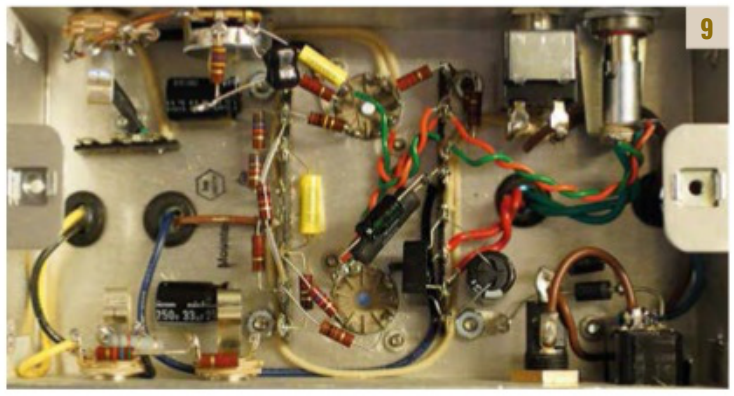

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the HV rail, any stored charge is safely drained away, making the amplifier safe to work on.

It's best practice to make a detailed sketch of the existing wiring to refer back to later. These days, however, a few photos taken on a smartphone provide all of the information that we need.

I can now desolder the six wires and remove the transformer from the chassis. The replacement unit is of the same form and dimensions, so bolts directly in using the same mounting holes and hardware. Once installed and the wires fed through the chassis grommets, I first connect the high-voltage red wires, next comes the two green wires, which in this amp are soldered directly to the jewel light socket.

Finally come the two primary wires – with the customer's permission I take the opportunity to reconfigure the power switch and mains fusing arrangement to bring the amplifier in line with the latest UK safety standards. The neutral wire from the transformer is attached directly to the IEC socket, whereas the live from the socket connects to the fuse holder, then onto the on/off switch before finally connecting to the transformer. If this amplifier had a captive mains cable, we'd have to switch both the live and neutral wires.

With all of the internal work done, I can now fire the amplifier up on the test bench, and once all voltages are verified and checked the chassis can be loaded into the cabinet. Of course, being a modern amplifier a transformer swap is feasible, but if you've bought a vintage model and want to keep it original then I would recommend buying an appropriately sized step-down transformer – a separate unit that will convert UK 240v mains down to 120v or so. Good luck with your purchase! G

Visit riftamps.com to find out more about Rift's range of British-built, handwired valve amplifiers

4 Removing the chassis we can see the wire colours all match up with our replacement, with the exception of the UK-specific live and neutral wires

5 The hi-voltage electrolytic capacitors store a lethal charge, so must be discharged before we start

6 Taking a picture of your 'before' wiring is always advisable before you start taking anything apart

7 Desoldering and removing the original transformer and installing the new one is a simple job because the hardware and mounting holes are identical

8 Time to solder the new transformer's wires in place, and reconfigure the power switch and mains fusing to UK safety standards

9 Soldered in and tidied up, the new transformer is ready to test

10 If all this seems like a lot of hassle – or if you have a vintage amplifier – a separate step-down transformer is a more straightforward option

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12

There are a few differences between the vibratos found on AVRI (left) and Classic Player models (right), most notably the screw-in arm on the Classic Player

TECH TALK
GOOD VIBRATIONS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

In the second dose of Michael James Adams' new guitar tech column, he dives into the mysterious world of the Jazzmaster trem-lock…

Confession: I've been pretty busy, not that I'm complaining! It's just that between playing shows, writing articles for *Guitar.com*, prepping for an upcoming tour, and the ever-present minutiae of day to day life, there just hasn't been as much time for tech-ing as there used to be. Which is sad, because of all of life's many joys, one of my favourites is the feeling that comes with nursing guitars back to good health.

As a result, I tend to be a little more choosy with the jobs I take on, because when I do accept a gig, I want to put my whole self into the project. I really love taking my time with a repair, digesting the finer details of the player's needs and the shortcomings of the instrument, and after all of that I come out on the other side with a deeper understanding of my craft. These things make a buzz in my brain like a battery on the tongue; learning is always its own reward.

As such, I have a few rules that help me decide which requests are beneficial for both myself and the player asking me for help. And the one rule that supersedes all others is thus: *Never say no to an offset*.

On this particular occasion, I found myself working on a recent Fender Classic Player Jazzmaster, a popular and affordable gateway drug into the offset world [recently reinvented as the Vintera '60s Jazzmaster Modified – Ed] which takes a few liberties with the vintage formula while more or less maintaining the overall feel and sound. They're good entry points for those curious about what offset guitars are all about, albeit with some changes – in my opinion, some are more successful than others.

For instance, I like the gently angled neck pocket, which ensures the neck always has a baseline of the requisite tilt-back, reducing the need for shims. The pickups – which are more like P-90s stuffed inside Jazzmaster covers, instead of the usual rod magnets and flat coils of more traditional instruments – have a throaty and powerful sound that can be a lot of fun for fans of more aggressive offset tones.

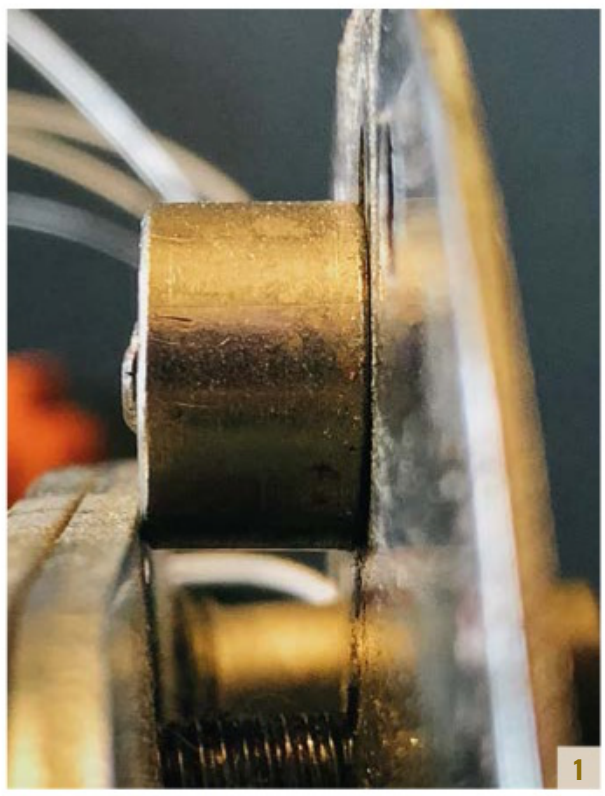
However, the modified vibrato positioning puts the arm in a weird spot for the way I play, and for all of the marketing buzz, that new location on the body doesn't really change the angle of the strings all that much. Additionally, the radius of the Adjusto-Matic bridge doesn't match that of the fingerboard, and as a result achieving a consistent-feeling setup across the 'board can be difficult. Will these minor quibbles of mine matter to anyone else? Probably not! But hey, I know what I like.

ON LOCKDOWN

While discussing these issues, the owner mentioned that they were having trouble activating the trem-lock on the guitar's import vibrato. For those unfamiliar, that little button isn't simply for turning the guitar into a hardtail; Leo Fender's true intention for that bit of hardware was as a mechanical memory for string tension, allowing the player to bring the guitar back in-tune in the event of a broken string.

When a string pops, the vibrato will pull sharp because string tension is reduced while that of the spring stays constant. The unit becomes unbalanced and suddenly nothing sounds right, but if you've got this mechanism figured out, you can simply slide the button back, which locks the string anchor plate back where it was before the break, and presto! You can finish the song perfectly on-key.

Personally, this little trick has saved me a number of times over the years. It's a genius idea that works flawlessly, provided that it's set up correctly. But this one just wasn't working at all. Any time I tried to slide the slug back into position, it would just pop out again. I'd never encountered this issue before, so the only thing to do was pop the vibrato off of the body and have a look at the internals.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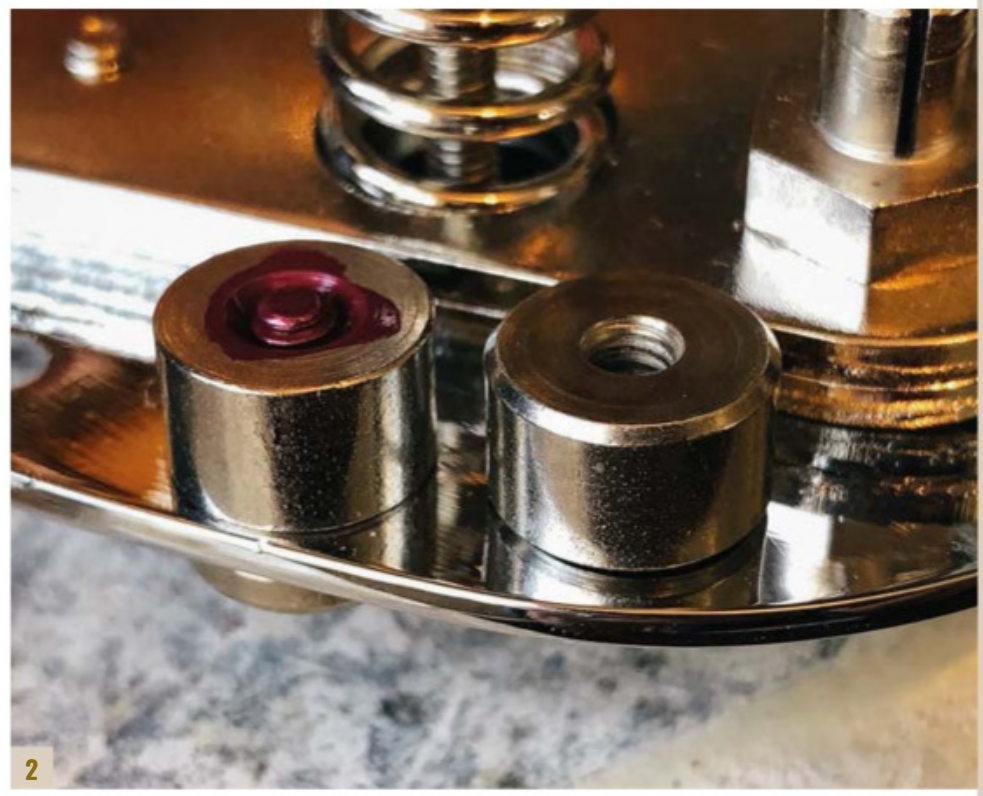
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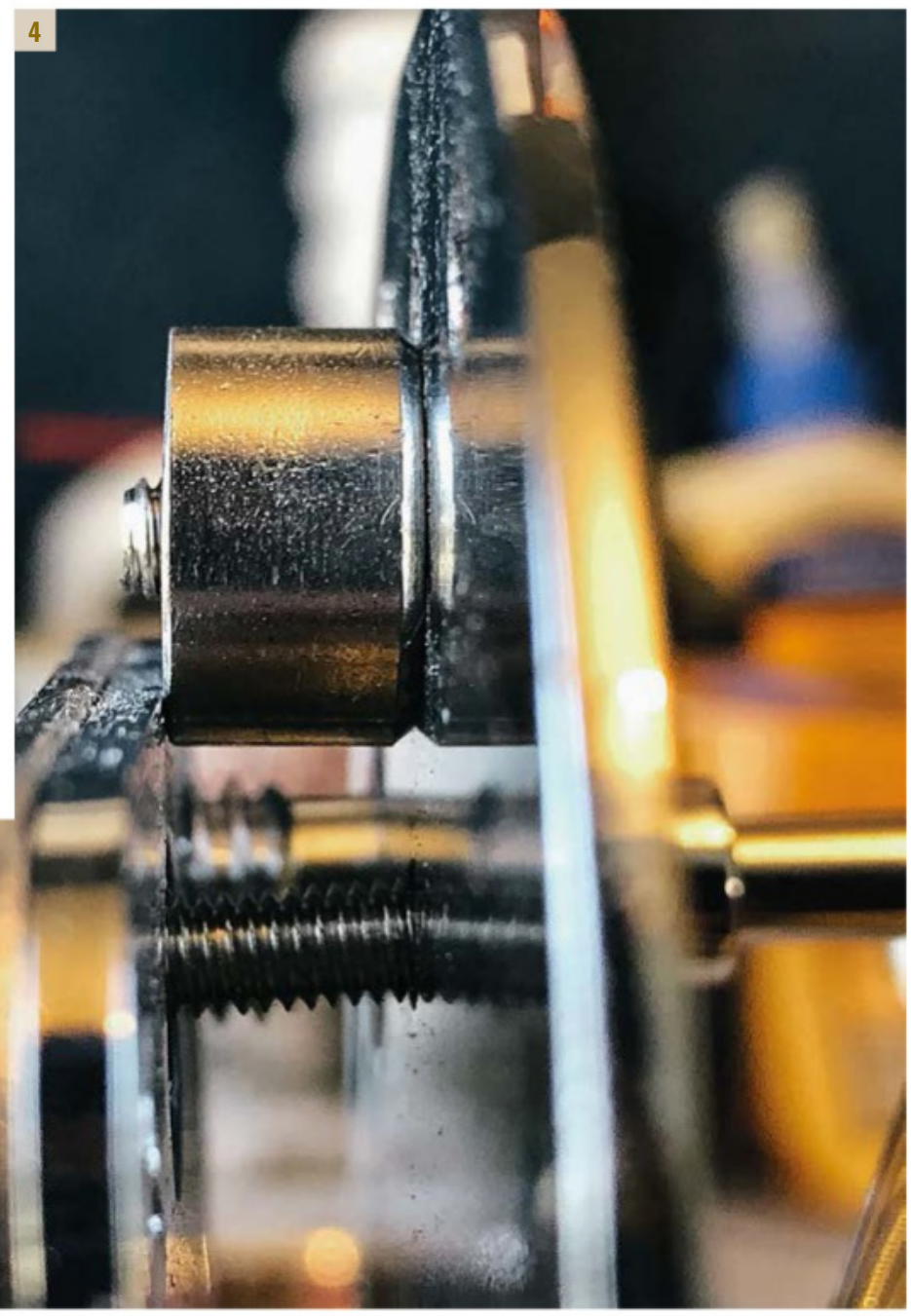
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1 The trem-lock button is engaged on this 1963 Jaguar vibrato. Note how little of the slug makes contact with the vibrato plate

2 Compare the two slugs: the AVRI part (left) has no bevel, while the Classic Player (right) does. That little angle caused a lot of trouble

3 I did this the old-fashioned way, I suppose. Still, it didn't take very long to achieve a flat bottom on the metal slug

4 The trem-lock button is now reinstalled and makes proper contact with the vibrato plate. If the owner breaks a string, this should help get them back in tune exactly as intended

Luckily, the issue became clear almost immediately. On vintage and US reissue units, the round metal slug is flat on both sides and slides under the string anchor plate, which locks it in place. You can see from photographs that only a sliver of the plate makes contact with the slug, so having maximum surface area here is crucial.

However, on the MIM vibrato, that slug is curiously bevelled on both sides. My guess is that a bevel on one side makes it easier to move the thing around (less friction) and doing so to both sides is a manufacturing choice – no extra time wasted figuring out which side is which.

With the bevel, that crucial amount of surface area is greatly reduced, and the slug has a much greater chance of popping out of alignment. If you plan on using the thing, this simply won't do.

The fix? Simply flatten out one side of the slug! I chose to do this the old-fashioned way with a strip of 80 grit sandpaper and some elbow grease, but I would have been grateful for a belt sander.

Thankfully, the job didn't take all that long, and within 10 minutes I had it reinstalled with a dab of Loctite to ensure the button bolt held in place. Now it slides into place with minimal effort, and more importantly, stays put!

Strung up with a fresh set of Ernie Ball 0.011s, the Classic Player Jazzmaster played and sounded great. It's always a pleasure getting a guitar like this into proper working order, and aside from the issues with the vibrato, I spent some extra time cleaning the frets, conditioning the fretboard with a small amount of lemon oil, reducing neck relief, and setting intonation.

Upon collection, the owner felt like they had a brand new guitar, which is something I like to hear. They plugged in, strummed a few chords and lost themselves in the music for a moment, and friends, that's reward enough for me!

For plenty more where this came from, follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen

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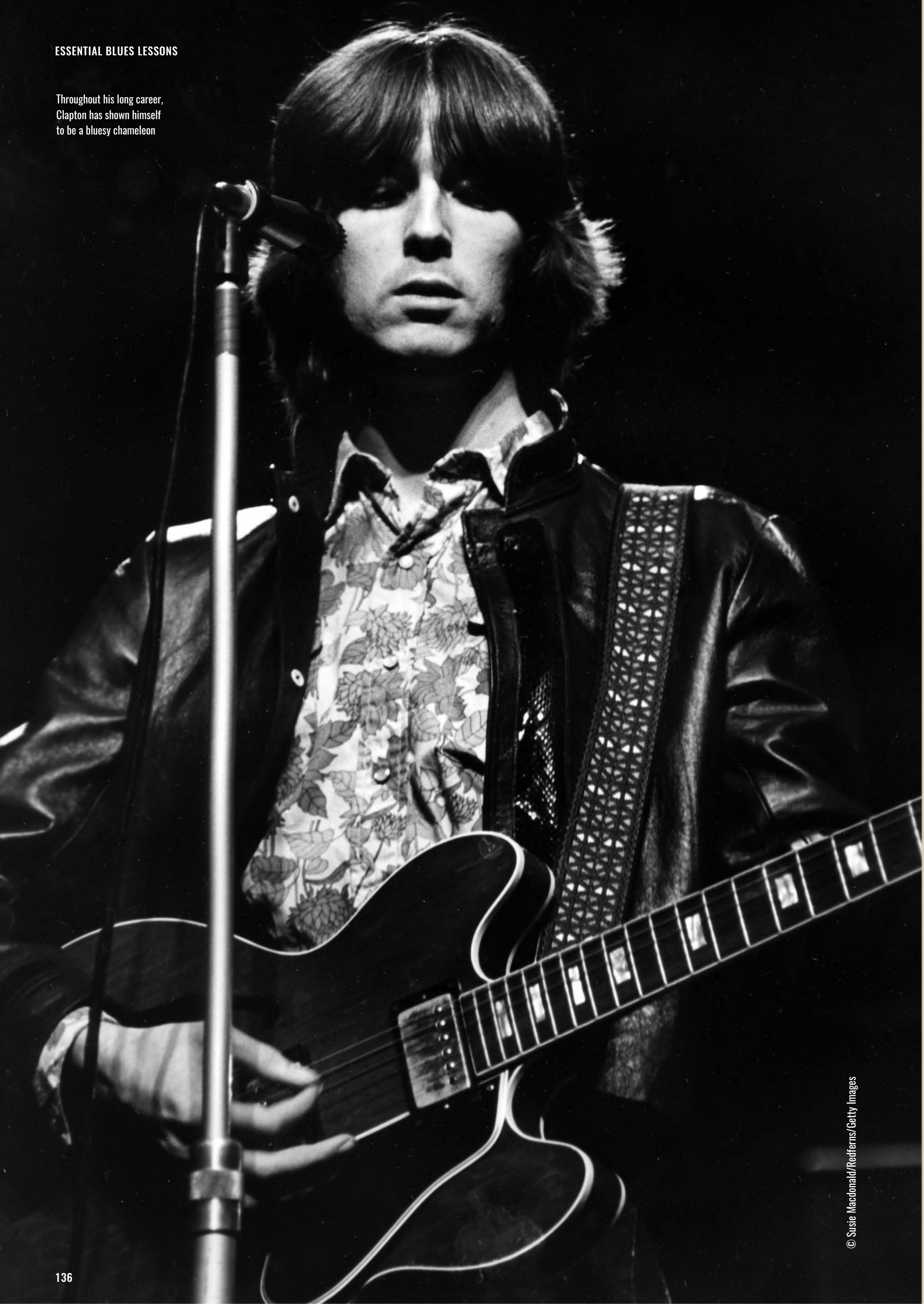
Throughout his long career, Clapton has shown himself to be a bluesy chameleon



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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART 15 PLAY BLUES LIKE ERIC CLAPTON

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Now that you've mastered the basics of the pentatonic scale, it's time to look at the masters to see how the most legendary blues players utilise the shapes we've learned in their own playing. First up, it's Old Slowhand…

There are not many guitarists who have as broad and influential a legacy as Eric Clapton – a musician whose wonderful style has become the blueprint for scores of contemporary artists but who has never been afraid to elevate the trailblazers who had such an impact on his own technique.

Famously referred to as 'God' while in his early twenties, Clapton has flirted with many styles during his decades-long career. We can't cover it all here but, as a starting point, we're going to outline five Clapton-style licks that run the gamut of his work, from the blazing phrases of the Bluesbreakers and the psychedelic grooves of Cream to the smooth country and slick rock of his solo material. So crank your amp, roll back the tone control and let your guitar sing like Eric.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

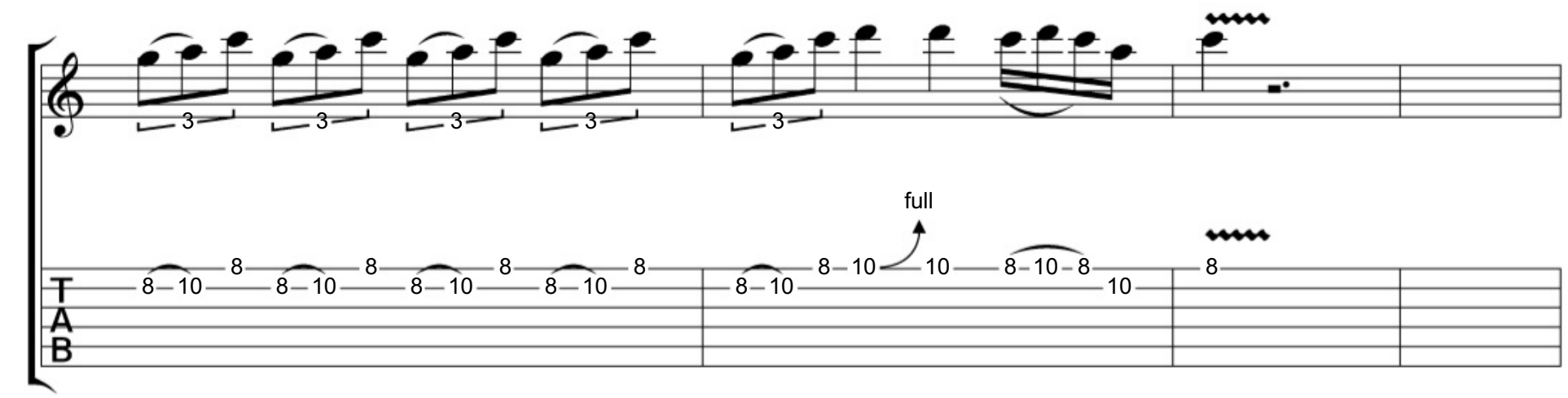
Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He's taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. He has over 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher.
www.mgrmusic.com

LICK 1

This lick is played using positions one and two of the G minor pentatonic scale and is influenced by Clapton's work on John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers' famed 'Beano' album. The lick has an urgent feel and is spread across three bars, with the initial bending run starting on beat 3 of bar 1. You'll notice a gap between the first and second part of the lick – and one of the most important things to learn about blues licks (or indeed any guitar part) is the value of negative space. The first phrase ends in bar 2, a 16th note after beat 2. Don't worry about trying to count this exactly; it's more about getting the feel right. The third and final bar starts on the '&' of beat 1.

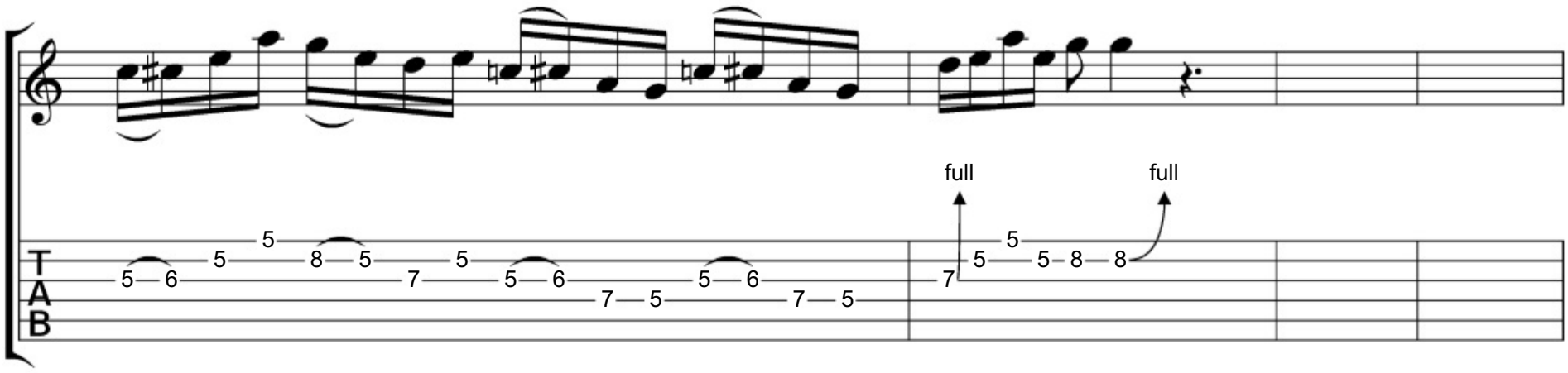
LICK 2

This is a melodic, repeating triplet-style lick. Clapton used phrases like this during the Cream days, in some of his upbeat improvisational passages. The lick is based in position two of the A minor pentatonic scale and as you can see is primarily based around triplets.



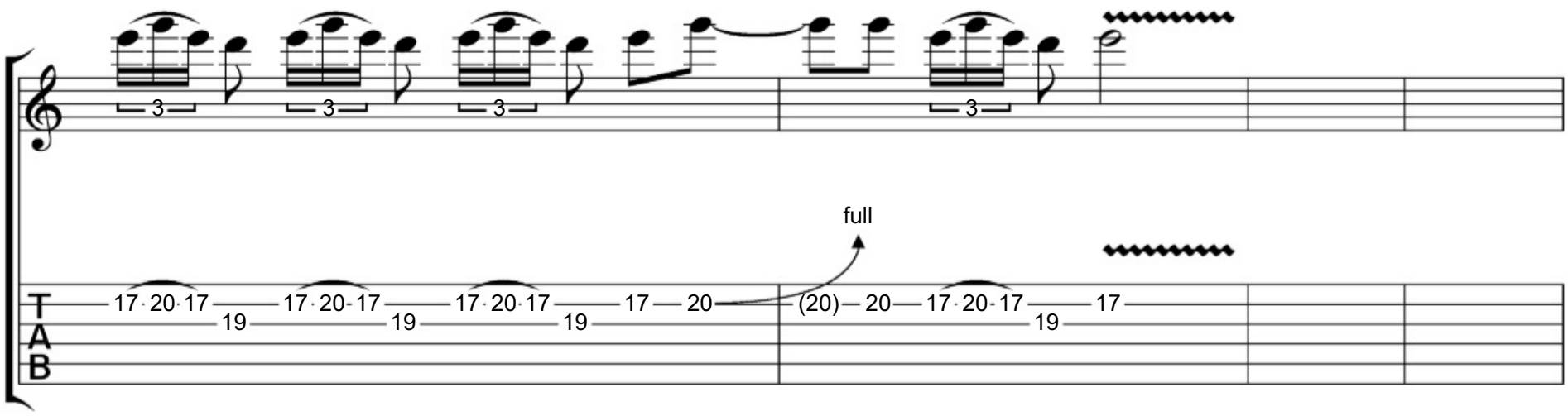
LICK 3

One of the most striking things about Clapton's work in Cream is the way he made classic blues licks and standards sound so fresh and vital. This A minor pentatonic lick is played using straight 16th notes. As this is a quick one, we can dial the tempo back to focus on making each note clean. You'll notice the addition of the 6th fret, which is not in the minor pentatonic scale. This lick requires you to hit four notes per beat in a strict fashion for bar 1, so take your time as you work through this flurry. Bar 2 opens with four notes across beat 1 before ending on an eighth and a quarter note.



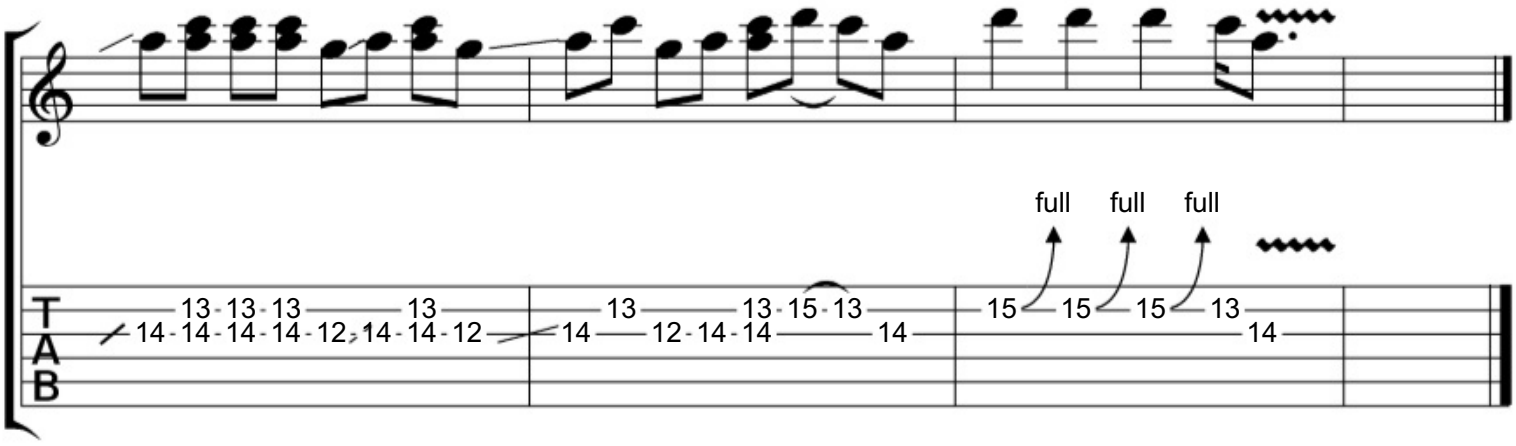
LICK 4

In a similar vein, this high-register lick is also based in position one of the A minor pentatonic scale, but starts an octave higher than the regular position (beginning on the 17th fret of the low E string). The first three beats in bar 1 alternate between a hammer-on/pull-off triplet between the 17th and 20th frets on the B string and a single eighth note on the 19th fret of the G string. The string bend that ends bar 1, on the '&' of beat 4, should be sustained until the '&' of beat 1 in bar 2.



LICK 5

The final lick uses doublestops and is based around position two of the D minor pentatonic scale. This lick works well in any key, over up-tempo or down-tempo blues. It features slides on the G string, which lend the lick a sense of forward momentum. While bars 1 and 2 may look complex, they are simply played as straight eighth notes.



TRY IT YOURSELF

These licks use various keys in the minor pentatonic scale, but are all transposable to any position or key in which you want to play them. Use them to add a little Clapton flavour to your own solos! Next month we'll look at another legend in the shape of Jimmy Page.

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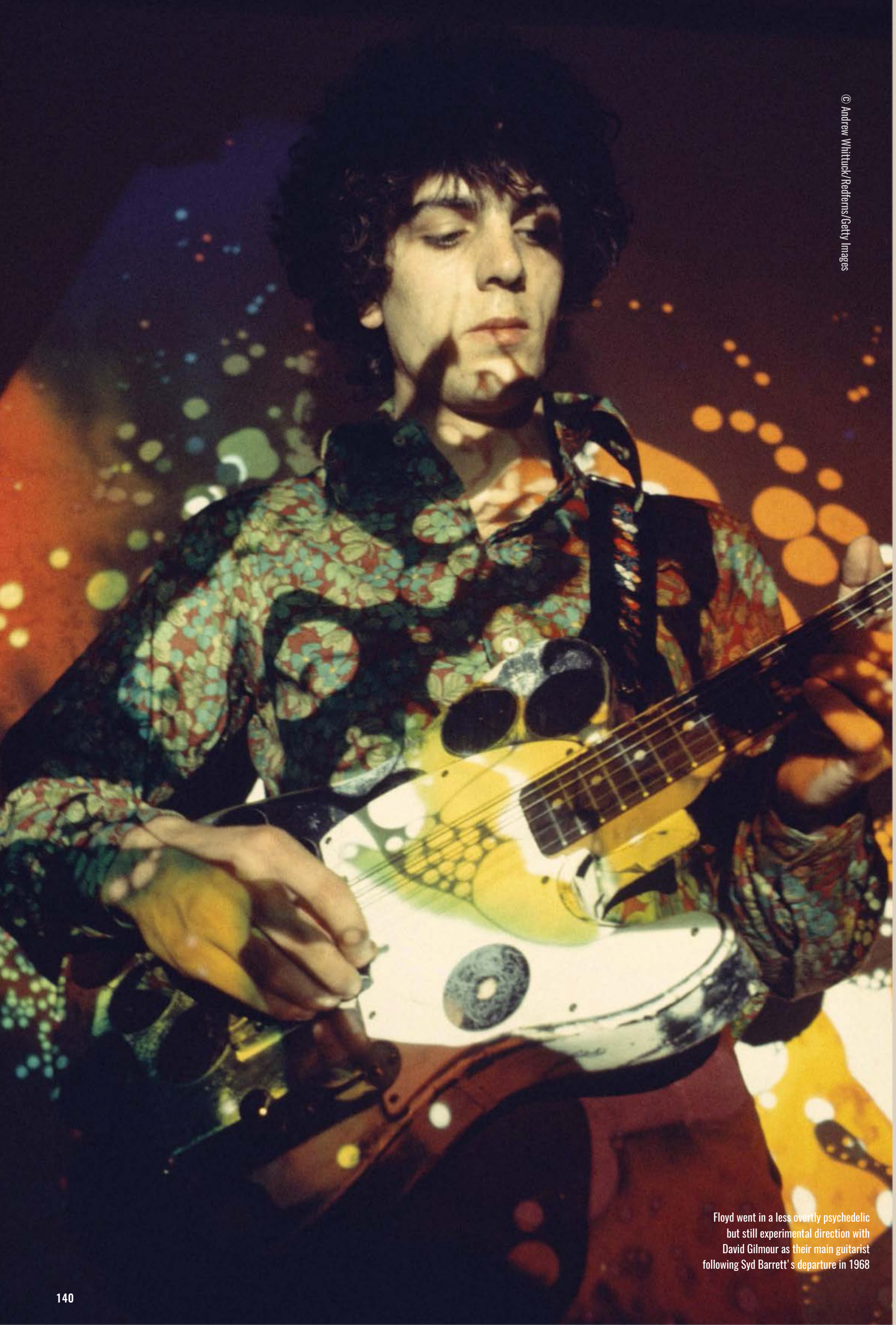

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Floyd went in a less overtly psychedelic but still experimental direction with David Gilmour as their main guitarist following Syd Barrett's departure in 1968

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE PINK FLOYD PART 1

WORDS ROD FOGG

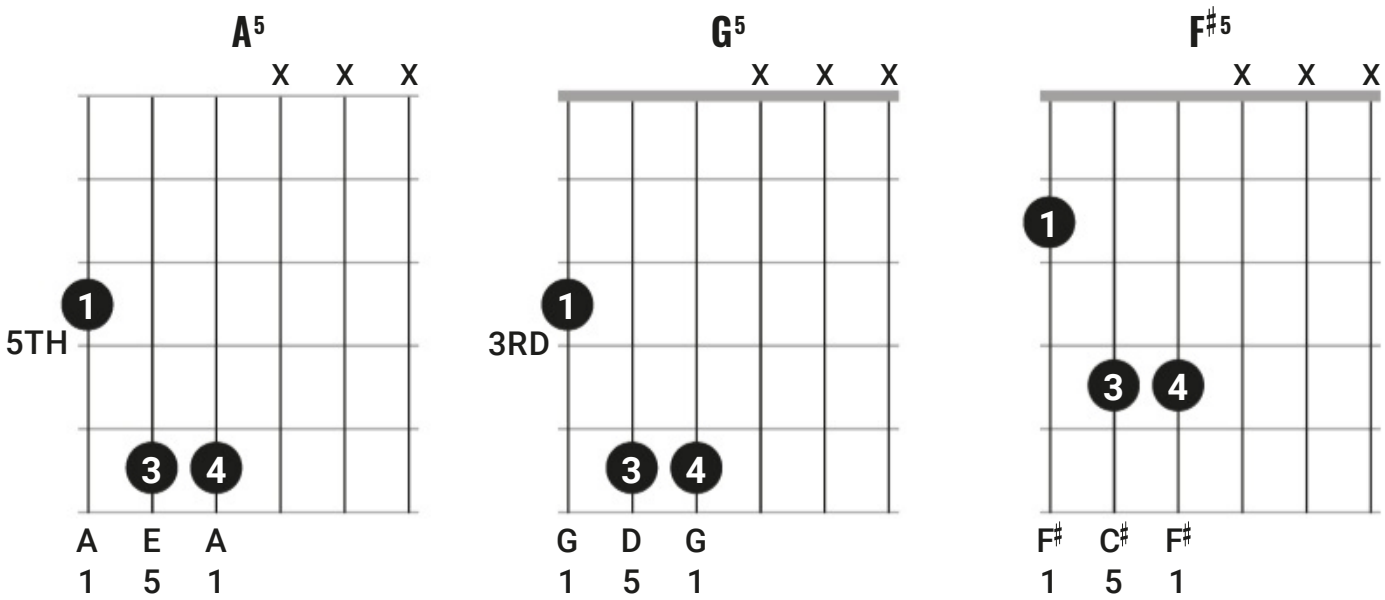
When Pink Floyd started out in the psychedelic mid-60s, they were playing clubs, led by Syd Barrett on guitar. When David Gilmour took over guitar duties, they began to craft the extravagant concept albums that saw them play in sold-out stadia all over the globe. But through it all, they never lost the knack for a compelling chord sequence…

Throughout a long, glittering career as members of rock's aristocracy, Pink Floyd have made ambitious use of lengthy chord sequences and surprising key changes. In the first of this two-part Chord Clinic, we go back to the very beginning, borrowing ideas from quirky and original songs from the hallucinogen-fuelled Syd Barrett era, before moving onto the more complex sequences that allowed the band to compose tracks of epic durations and redraw the landscape of rock music.

FIGURE 1

Some light palm muting and chugging downstrokes will help make sense of these five chords, which work their way down the guitar. Asymmetry is a feature of much early Floyd music; play three bars of A5 and a bar of G5 to make the first four bars. Then play a bar each of F#5 and F5, ending with two bars of E5.

This may be a simple eight-bar sequence but the unpredictable spacing of the chords adds a distinct character to the Barrett-inspired arrangement. You may have played 'five chords' before, most likely in the context of metal or heavy rock. In this case, however, we're looking for a clean sound, with a bright and bouncy feel.



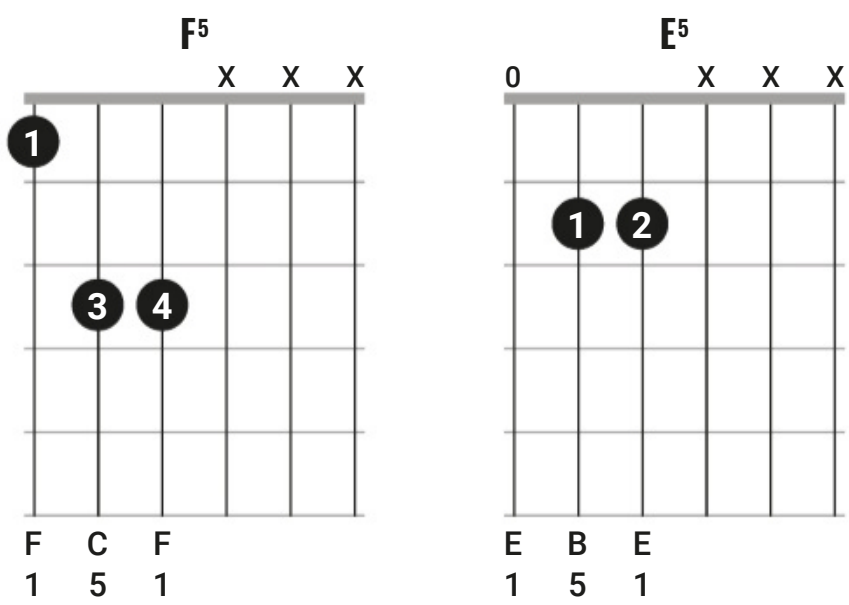


FIGURE 2

Here we have some conventional open-string chords. The A major gets a bar to itself, while the G and D chords share the next bar, with two beats each. Then we get two bars of E, right at the end of which, on beat 3, we have quick D and C major chords that lead to a repeat of this section. It's a four-chord sequence but, as before, it lacks symmetry, which plants it firmly in the 1960s.

Figure 2 can also lead us back to the top of figure 1 and a repeat of the whole sequence. Figures 1 and 2 provide a short lesson in basic chord theory: notice that the five chords consist of just the root note and the fifth, whereas the major chords have the root, third and fifth.

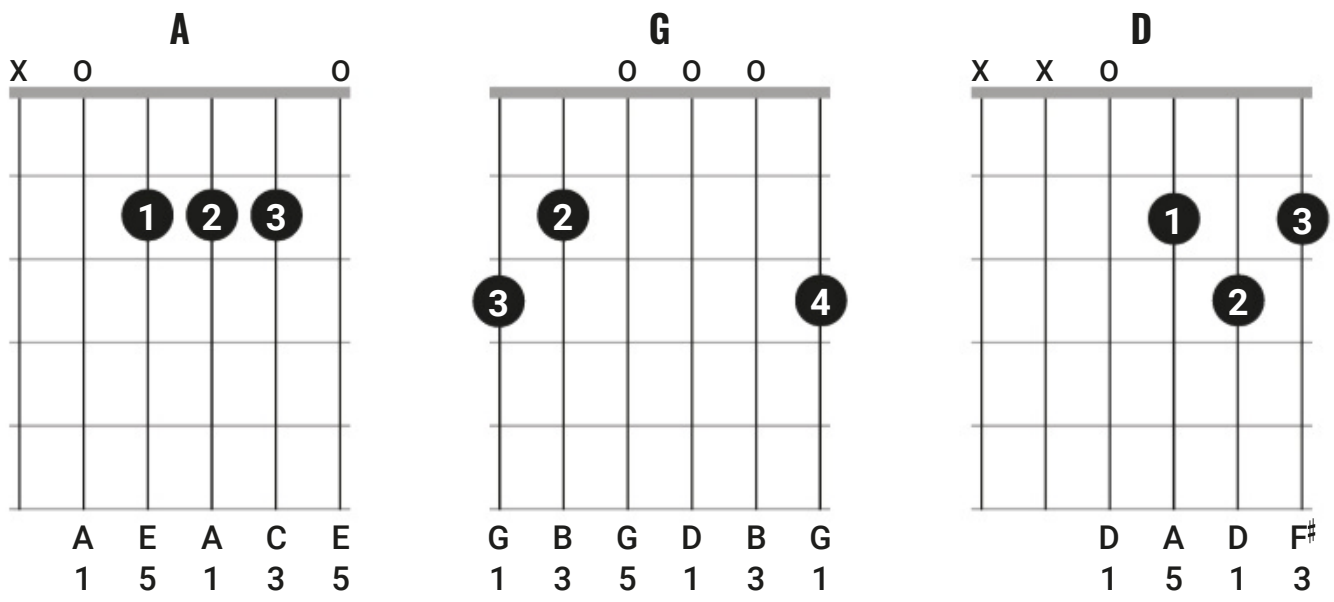


FIGURE 3

This is an aimless, deliberately dreamy Barrett-inspired sequence. Strum the first four chords, giving each one bar. Then play another bar of B minor followed by a bar of A minor and two bars of G, making eight bars altogether. You could also add a little spice by shifting to the D major chord slightly later, halfway through bar 2, rather than at the beginning.

The directionless quality of this sequence is achieved by going from G to B minor (chord III, never the strongest arrival point) and then returning more or less back to where you began. If this sequence served as a verse, we'd need to add something interesting to the chorus to liven things up, which brings us to figure 4.

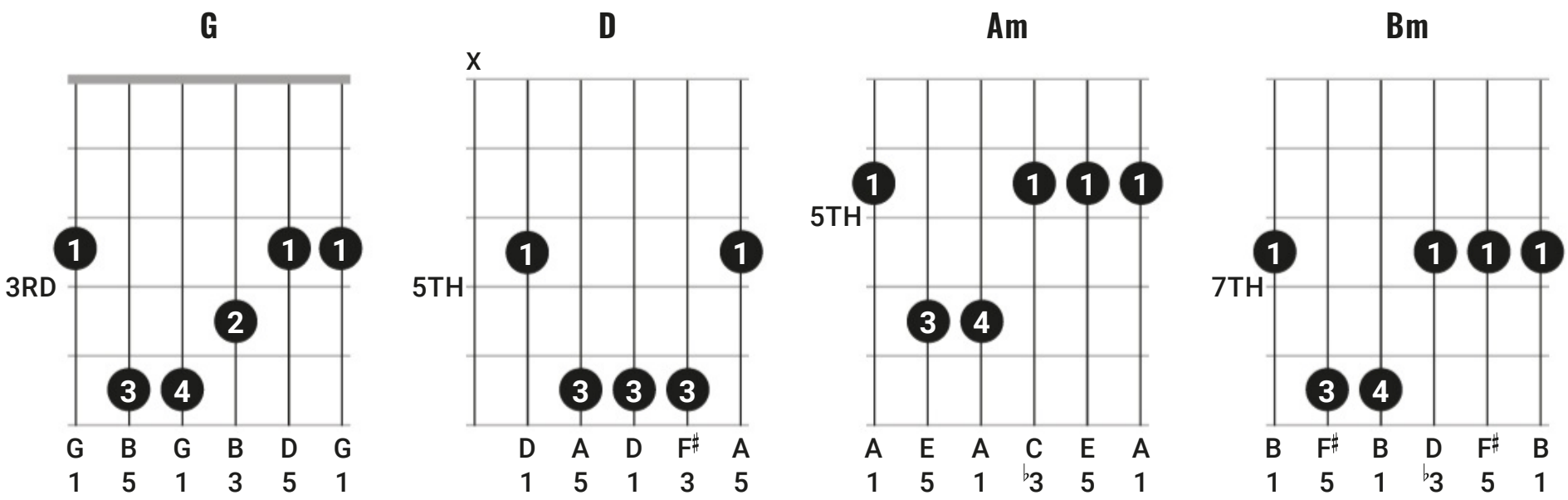


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FIGURE 4

This is an abrupt and surprising change of key. Play a bar of E and a bar of D three times before moving to the A chord for two bars. Try playing heavy downstrokes on the beat, each slightly detached from the next, staccato style. Finally, revisit the G chord from figure 3 to re-establish the original key. You can repeat the whole sequence.

Chord progressions such as these, made up of barre chords, can be quite a workout for the fretting hand. Relax and try not to pull with your elbow – a gentle squeeze from the thumb should be all you need to get your index finger flat across the strings. Barring is typically easier on electric guitars due to their lower action but, if you're up for a challenge, try this out on your acoustic.

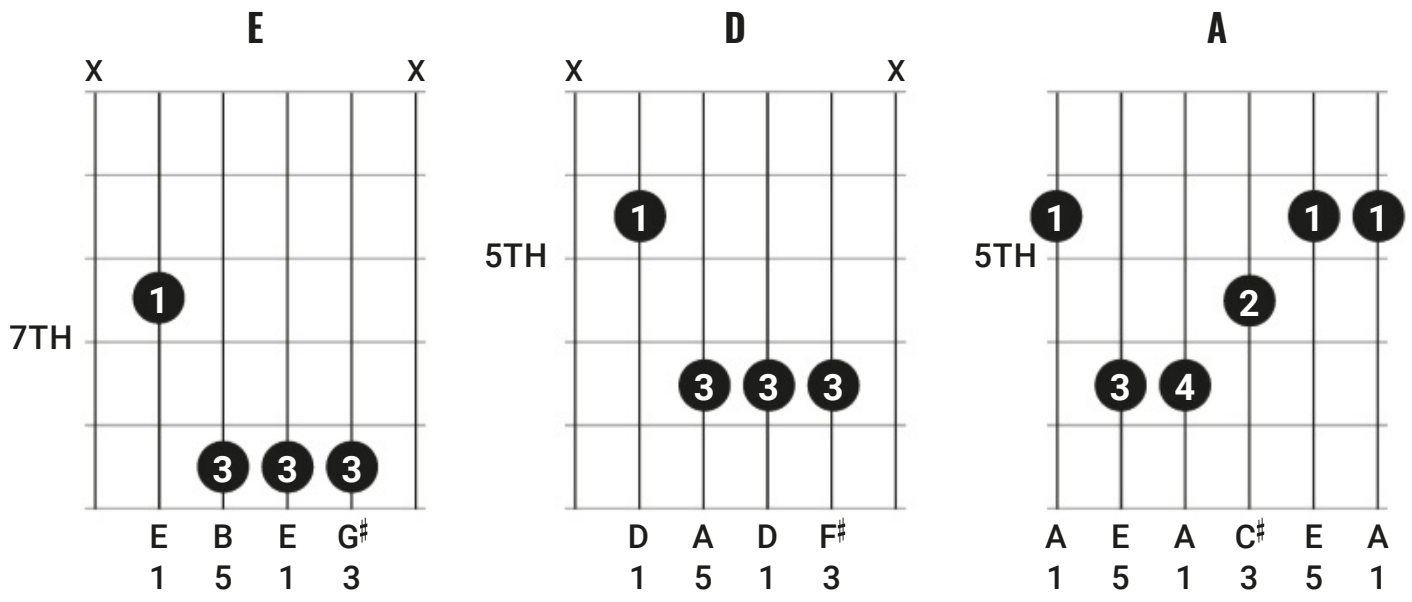
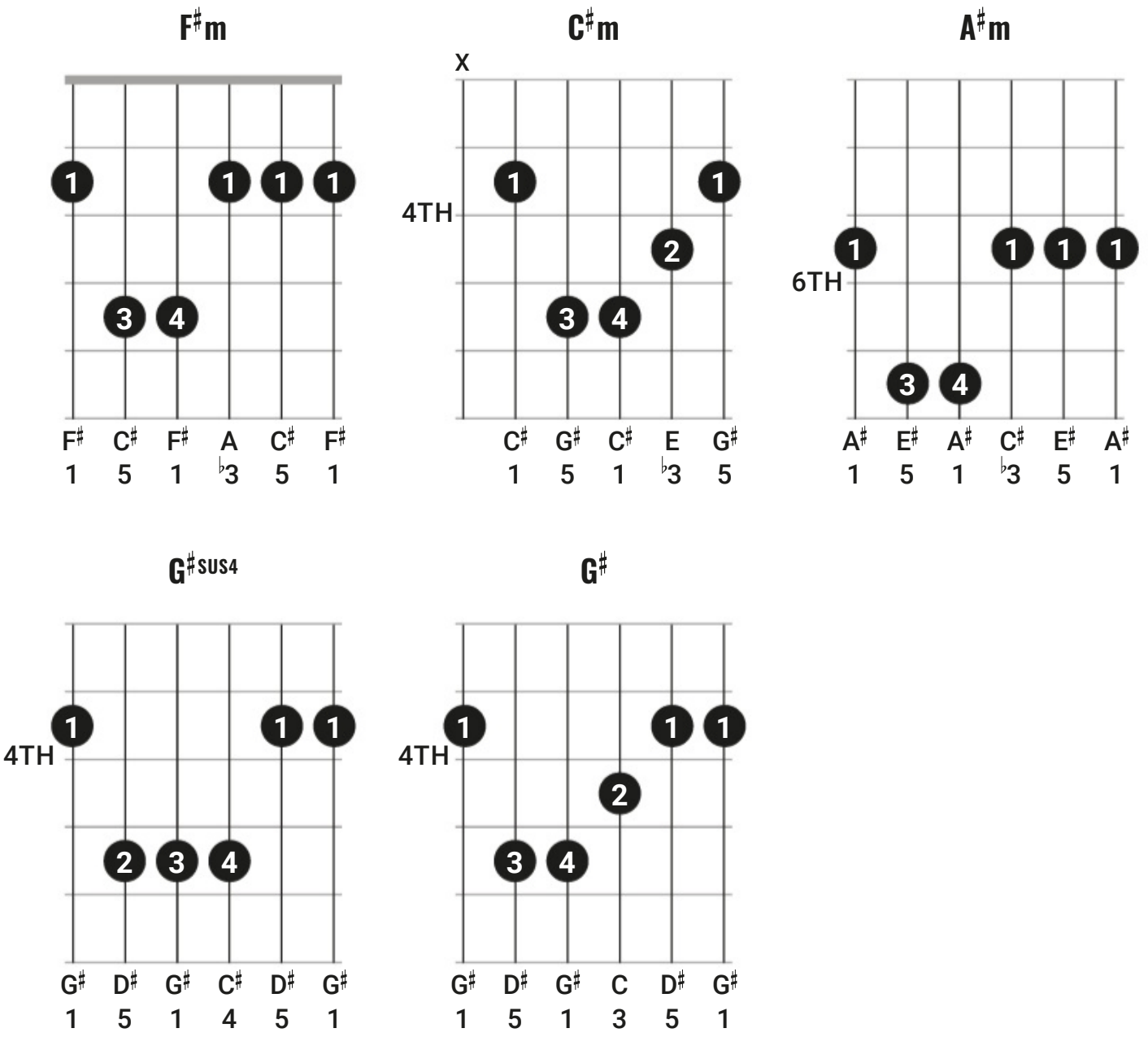


FIGURE 5

Our final chord sequence is an example from the David Gilmour era, perfect for use as a slow, quiet and engrossing introduction. Alternate between two bars of F# minor and two bars of C# minor. Keep playing – but remember that this kind of rock is never in a hurry to get where it's going. Build to a climax and, after your last C# minor chord, play one bar of A# minor, one bar of the A major from figure 4, and one bar each of the two G# chords, stopping on beat 1 of the G# major to let it ring.

Then it's back to the top to begin the sequence again. Don't be surprised if switching back to the F# minor chord after the G# chord seems a little uneasy – it's because the music has modulated. This means it has changed key, and the new key is C# minor. We'll look at what happens next in the second part of this two-part Chord Clinic. Meanwhile, have fun recording this sequence and see if you can add a solo based around the F# minor pentatonic scale over the opening chords.



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TALKBOX

‘DANISH PETE’ HONORÉ

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The purple Tele-toting Dane and star of the Andertons YouTube channel on ill-advised Lâgs, the importance of being nice and while you should always help yourself to cheese at the BRIT Awards…

The moment it all started...

“My mum and dad had an old Oscar Teller nylon-string lying around the house that me and my sister always played with. But when I was 11, we were at a school trip, and one of the dads had a guitar. He showed me A, D, and E and I picked it up immediately! Then he showed me some more chords and it came super easy to me, so he proceeded to give me lessons for free. The first song I learned was *Blackbird* – from then on I couldn’t stop playing…”

I couldn’t live without my...

“I have lots of great gear, and great guitars, but it has to be my purple Custom Shop Fender Telecaster, not just because it’s an incredible guitar, but also because it was a birthday present from my wife and my three girls.”

The one that got away...

“It was a 1976 Les Paul Standard in tobacco burst, and it was my first ever proper guitar. I bought it after Gary Moore released *Still Got The Blues* – I became a little obsessed with that album! It was hanging in my local music shop and they were always the coolest, they would let me buy stuff and pay it off when I could, so I went with some of the money I saved and bought the guitar, I think it cost around £700-ish.

“I loved it, but then for some stupid reason I saw a green Lâg… it wasn’t me at all, but I swapped it for my Gibson and instantly regretted it. But when I went back to the shop they had sold my Les Paul – gutted! I think I swapped the Lâg for a pink Kramer and from there I got into Strats. The funny thing is, it is still in my hometown and my dad knows who has it, but the guy doesn’t want to sell it, so there we are!”

My signature model...

“I think I would learn towards something like my purple Telecaster, because it’s killer. I have an awesome set of signature pickups that Monty’s has made for me and I absolutely love them, they would definitely be a part of it.”

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

“I play whatever the guitar inspires me to play! Playing as many guitars as I’m lucky enough to when filming the Andertons videos, I have made that a thing. We do four, maybe more, videos in a day and there is a beginning and an ending jam, plus the playing in the middle – after two videos it’s hard not to play the same thing over and over, so I let the guitars give me the inspiration.”

The best advice I’ve ever been given...

“I think the best is to ‘just be nice’ – it works with everything. Be happy for your peers when they get a gig or a tour you want, always say please and thank you, good people do things for other people. And if you do good things, you’ll get good things back – karma I guess!”

My ‘Spinal Tap’ moment...

“I won’t go into too much detail, but I once did a gig in Tokyo, I think it was, and I had some bad shellfish the night before – you can work out the rest! I’ve also fallen over on stage a few times, and I may have once left the BRIT Awards with a huge wheel of cheese!”

My guilty pleasure...

“I like a bit of R&B – Boyz II Men, Babyface, Mariah, Whitney, NSYNC and so on – good grooves, good chords! Check out Babyface on *MTV Unplugged* – it’s just awesome. Oh, and perhaps a little bit of Steel Panther, just because!”

The most important thing on my rider...

“Having been lucky enough to have played a fair few tours, including a stadium tour, I would want a very comfortable chair to sit in, because there is a lot of waiting around.”

If I could just play one thing...

“I’m not sure! I think if I needed to play a song I would sit down and spend the time learning it, but I wouldn’t mind being able to shred some Van Halen once in a while.”

Follow Pete on Instagram at @mrpeterhonore, or check out his YouTube channel at youtube.com/peterhonore

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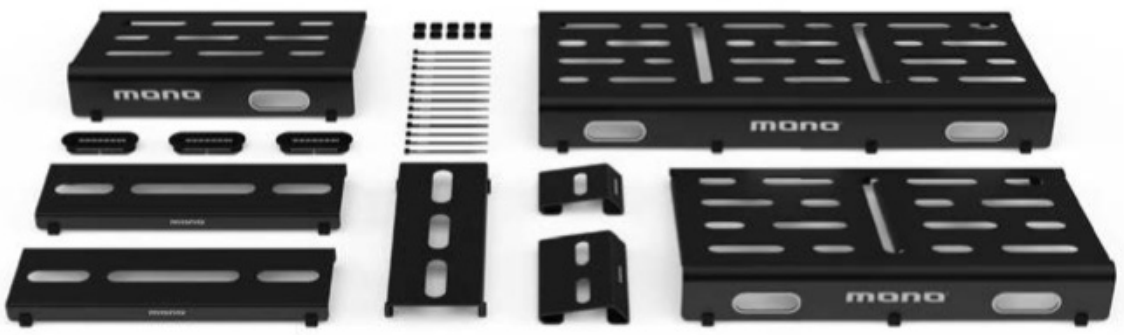
DESIGN THE PERFECT SETUP.
MONO pedalboards, risers and accessories combine to keep your setup neat and sleek, for absolute pedal access with no distractions from your music.



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